

## In Search of the Snoqualmie/Milwaukee Road Ski Bowl of the 1930s and '40s

Dave Galvin

On July 27, 2013, an intrepid group of ski historians met at Webb's Restaurant at Snoqualmie Summit before heading out to explore the Hyak area in search of remnants of the earliest ski area that had flourished there from 1938 until 1950. The group included **Dave Moffett** (Webb's son and the leader of the effort to create the Washington State Ski and Snowboard Museum at Snoqualmie Pass); **John Lundin** (former Sahalie member who has written numerous articles about local as well as Sun Valley area ski and railroad history); **Kirby Gilbert** and his daughter, **Katja**, (Kirby is ski historian extraordinaire who has published numerous articles in national and international ski history journals); **Jack Leeper** (Hyak resident who has explored much of the area and keeps up the "lost ski areas/Hyak" website); **Steve Allen** ("Mr. Ski Lift" who had worked on most of the lifts in Washington State over the past 40+ years - including Sahalie's! - based early-on at Mission Ridge and for the past 30 years at Stevens Pass, a friend of Marla and Dave Wellington-Weigelt); **Matt Broze** (Seattle Ski Club member in the 1950s whose dad was skiing all these slopes in the 1930s and beyond and who won the Silver Skis race on Mt. Rainier in 1942); **Jerry Hanley** (ski videographer who went to school with Tom Gobeille and who produced the wonderful 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary video of Summit at Snoqualmie last spring); and **Neil McDonald** (Moffett's son-in-law).

As the day progressed we learned that the whole early ski area, known before WWII as the Snoqualmie Ski Bowl and after the war as the Milwaukee [Road] Ski Bowl (after the railroad that sponsored the area), was located to the southeast of what we know now as "Hyak" or "Summit East." Essentially all of what was this pioneering ski area is overgrown in forest that is trying to reclaim the slope to the southeast of the current Hyak ski slopes (Figure 1).

The Milwaukee Road railroad developed the original area in time for the 1937-'38 ski season, and it flourished until World War II caused it to close in 1942. It reopened for the 1946-'47 season, but closed finally in 1950 after a 1949 fire destroyed the base lodge and the railroad lost interest in this side venture.

Figure 2 shows the location of the original ski area in 1938, with all the runs located below the old railroad right-of-way that we now cross-country ski on as we head around Mt. Catherine.



Figure 1. The upper portion of the old ski bowl as it appears today, overgrown. Note the new Hyak chairlift on the right. Original ski runs, as shown in Figure 2, were all below this image. Note how the topography in the center of this photo matches that to the left of the skier insert in Figure 2. (Photo by Dave Galvin, July 2013.)

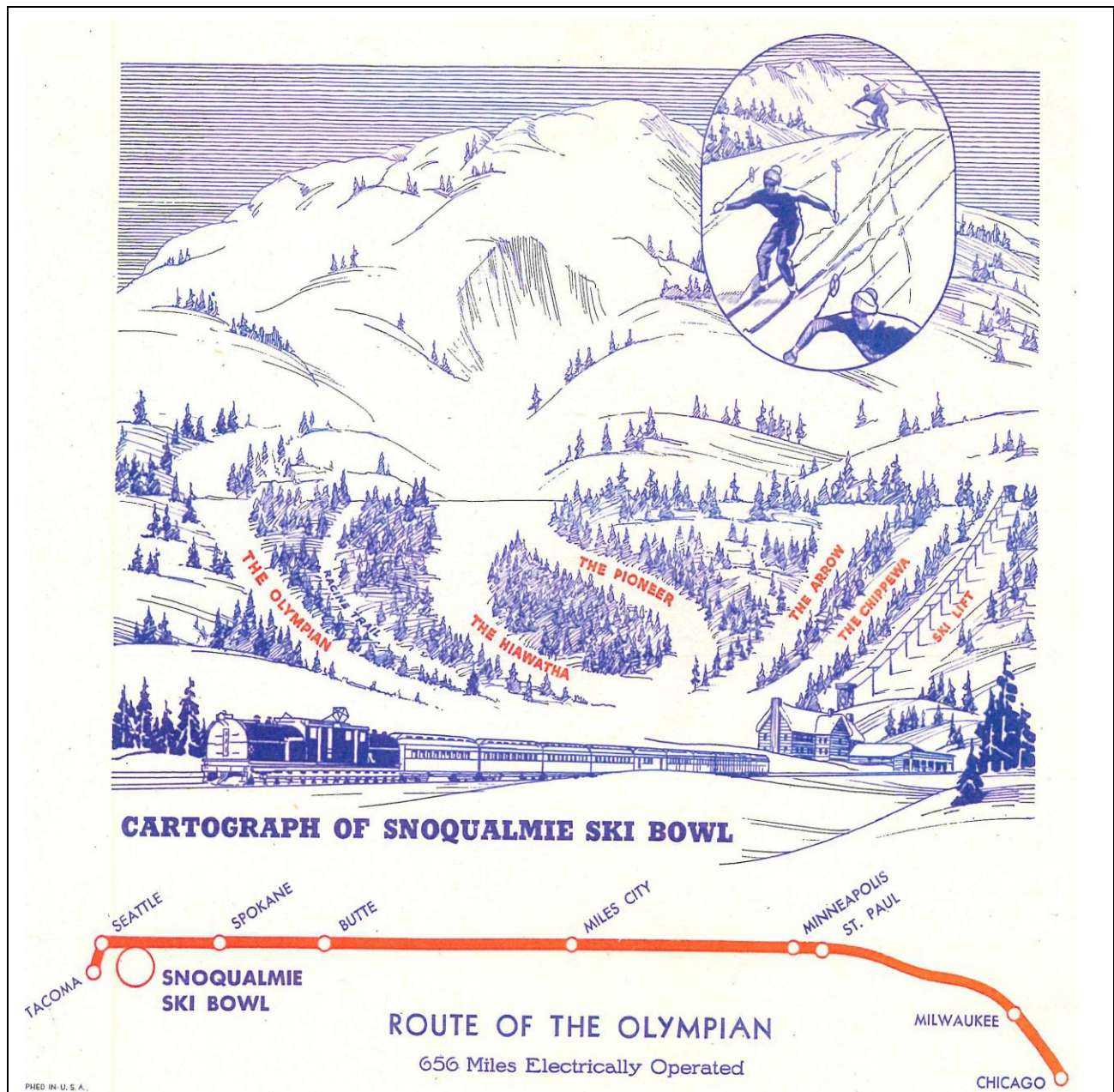
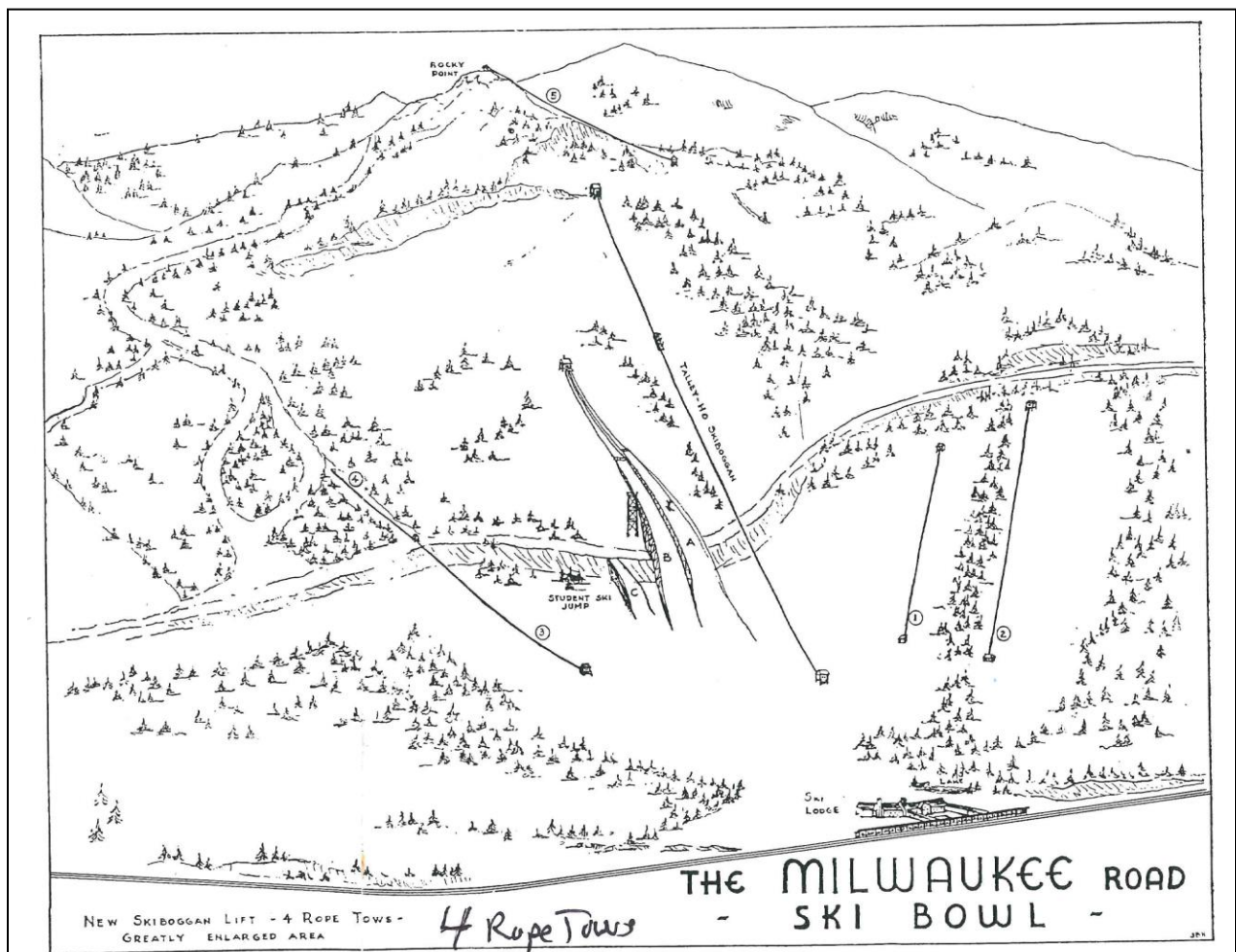


Figure 2. Stylized image of the first Snoqualmie Ski Bowl opened in January 1938, near what we now call Hyak, by the Milwaukee Road railroad (after WWII it was renamed the Milwaukee Road Ski Bowl). The five ski runs were named after the major named trains of the Milwaukee Road that ran between Seattle/Tacoma and Chicago in the late 1930s. Note the horizontal line at the top of the ski runs: this was the abandoned, original rail alignment where the tracks first went over the Summit from 1909 through 1914, with a stop at Laconia; in 1915 the railroad abandoned this route in favor of one slightly lower at this spot that went through the tunnel (now part of the John Wayne Pioneer Trail, even though actor John Wayne likely never saw it!). We cross-country ski along this abandoned rail right-of-way when we head from Hyak around the Mt. Catherine loop. The site of the original base lodge is now where the sewage lagoons are located adjacent to the John Wayne Trail of the Iron Horse State Park. The entire current Hyak ski area (Summit East) is located to the northwest/right of this image. (Map from Milwaukee Road, c. 1938; image from the collection of Kirby Gilbert.)



Just before the war, a couple massive ski jumps were developed uphill of the original five ski runs; the area below was cleared into a wide, open slope, and some major ski jumping tournaments were hosted on this hill.

Immediately after the war, the area reopened as the Milwaukee [Road] Ski Bowl for the 1946-'47 winter season. Figure 3 shows a drawing of the area as it was then configured, including 5 rope tows and the innovative "Talley-Ho Skiboggan" lift that carried skiers standing up in metal sleds to a point higher than the ski jumps. The Olympic ski jumping trials were hosted here in 1947 and the national championships were held on the Milwaukee A jump in 1948.



**Figure 3.** This image from the Milwaukee Road Ski Bowl's promotional flier in 1946-'47 shows the big ski jumps (A and B) plus the junior jump (C), 5 rope tows (including one up high on Rocky Point), and the Talley-Ho Skiboggan route immediately northwest of the ski jumps. The current Summit West (Hyak) ski area is to the right of all of these lifts. (Image from Milwaukee Road, 1946, from the collection of Kirby Gilbert.)

Figure 4 shows a photo of the Talley-Ho Skiboggan lift developed by Keith Talley and put into operation after the war in 1946. Figure 5 shows a group of ski jumpers with a clear view behind to the jumps and lower slopes of the Ski Bowl, c. 1946. Figure 6 shows a photo by Bob and Ira Spring of the Hyak area in the early 1960s. The new ski area is cleared to the northwest, while remnants of the old Milwaukee Bowl development can be seen to the southeast.

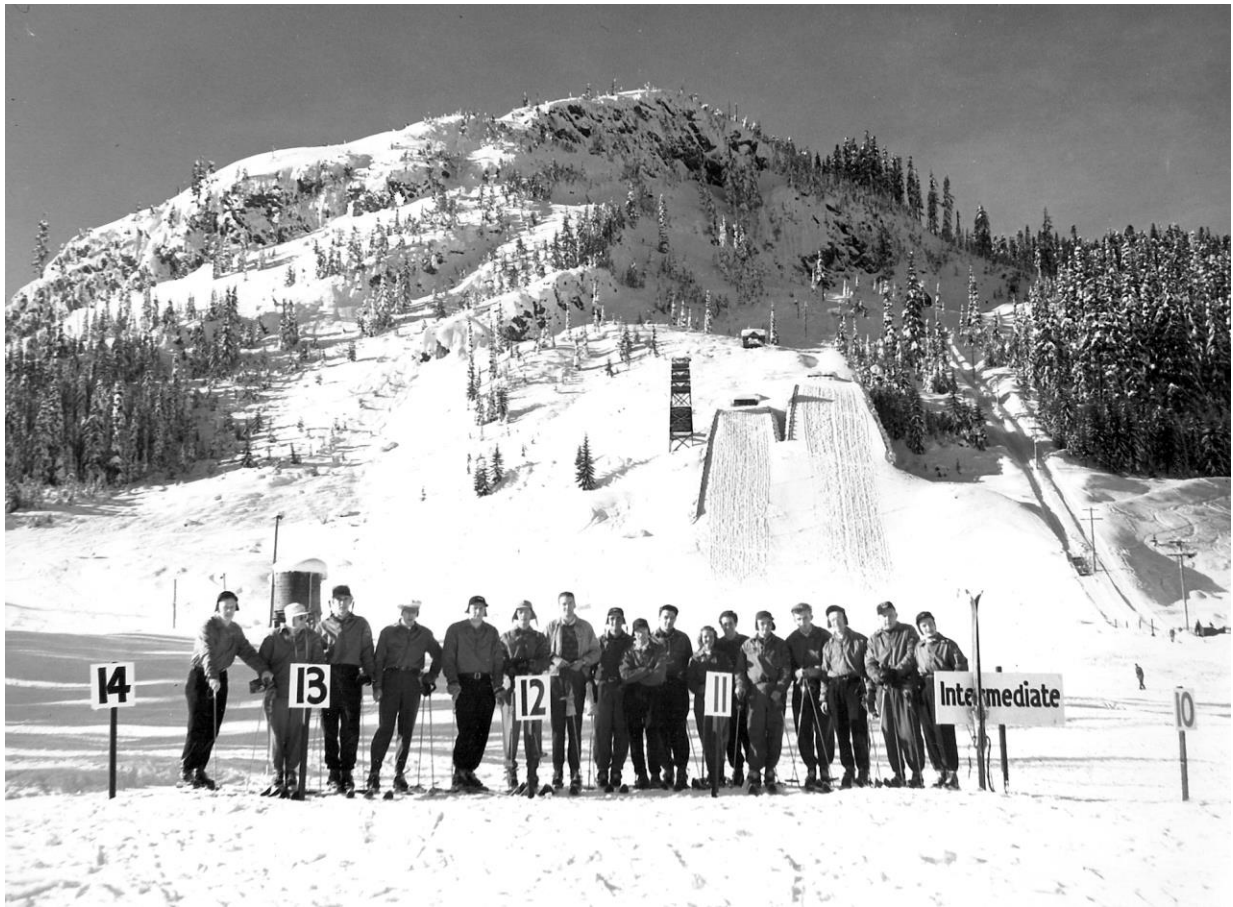


**Figure 4. Photo of the Tally-Ho Skiboggan at the Milwaukee Road Ski Bowl c. 1947. The up sled is on the left (note skis being carried up), while the down sled is to the right carrying sightseers. (Photo by \_\_ Johnston, from the collection of Jack Leeper.)**

We started our exploration on July 27<sup>th</sup> at the top of rope tow #1 shown in Figure 3, on the northwest side of the old ski area. Jack Leeper had found the top of this tow in an undeveloped lot between ski chalets on a lower residential road. The top of the tow still exists, including two tall telephone poles with lower and upper shim wheels, plus an old electric engine and a mess of parts partially covered by debris. This lot is scheduled to be developed, so this one historical anchor point will soon be lost.

We next drove around on access roads to the old RR right-of-way and stopped right where the B jump is located in Figure 3. There is a ton of old wood fragments scattered above and below the road where the two trestles were built for the A and B jumps' landing ramps that allowed the jumpers to launch over the old RR right-of-way to get to the steeper landing slopes below. We also noted four large concrete footings that could have been for either the jump trestles or the judges' tower that shows up in many





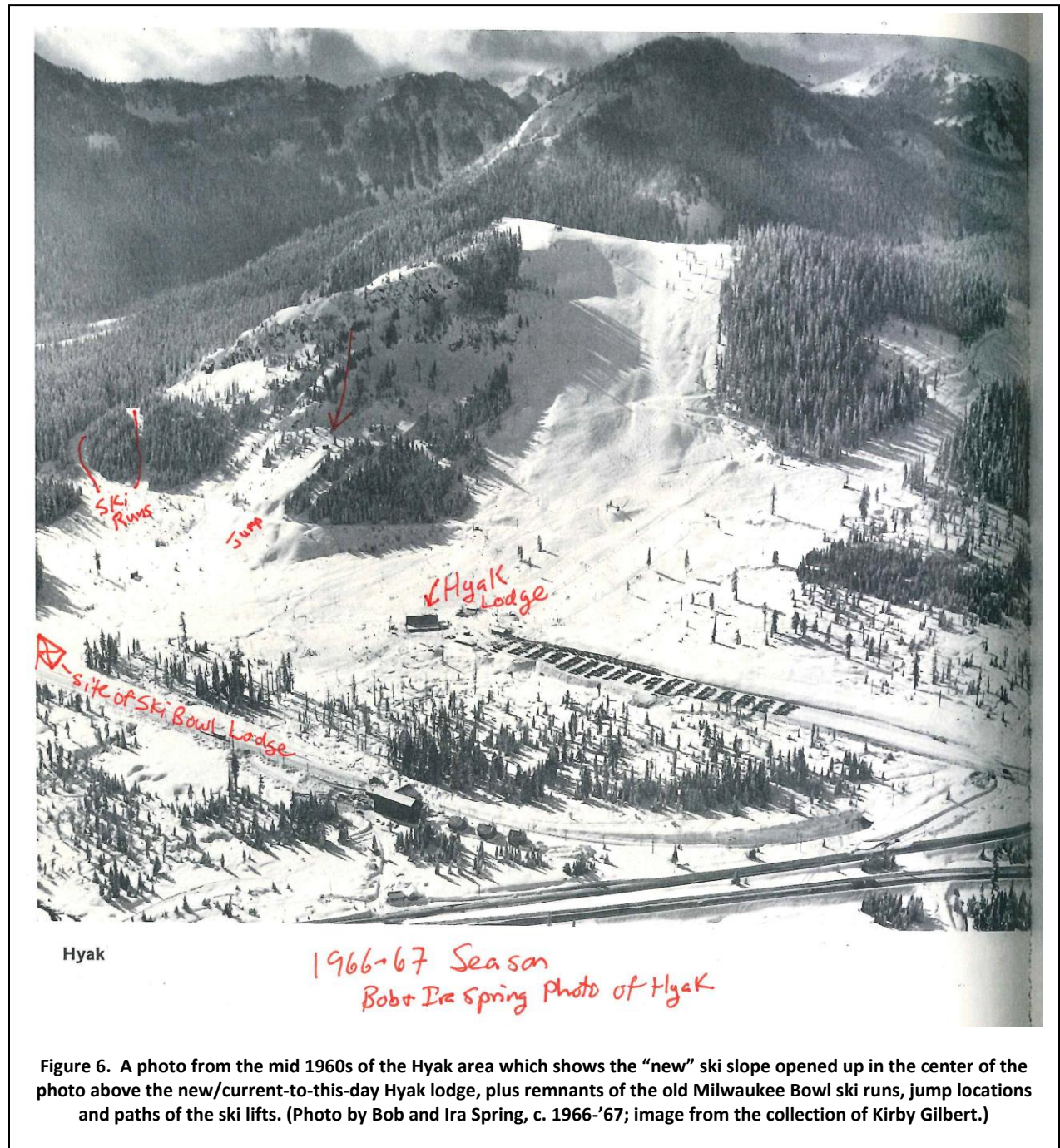
**Figure 5. Ski jump class c. 1946 with the “C” jump immediately above the 12, the “B” jump above the 11, and the “A” jump just to the right (west) of the B. On the right side can be seen the track for the Talley-Ho Skiboggan. This entire Ski Bowl lies southeast of the current Hyak (“Summit East”) ski area. (Photo source unknown; image from the collection of Kirby Gilbert.)**

images of the day. I have seen snow boarders hiking up-slope right where the C jump is located in order to use the cross-country (former RR road) track as their kicker to fly down into the lower slopes. Rich Poelker reminisced about one of his scariest moments on skis when he launched off of this C jump in the 1950s as part of a ski meet, representing his high school ski team. He had never been off a ski jump before, and he never went back. Let’s just say he didn’t make a clean landing, and was lucky he didn’t break anything.

Jack Leeper then took us up-slope to the site of the top of the old Talley-Ho Skiboggan, a trip that involved some bush-wacking and that impressed us with the steep slope below from which the ski jumps launched. This whole area is southeast of the new chair lift at Summit East. We congregated at a spot full of old timber and metal in a mess reminiscent of a plane crash (see Figure 7). Amongst the rubble, there were at least five identifiable “cars” (sleds/toboggans) made of metal and wood. At first we thought these were the Skiboggans, but on further discussion we think that what we found were smaller sleds, maybe ones used on the upper tow toward Rocky Point. It will take some excavation to

pull out the shards of old planks that made up the upper lodge structure (maybe with a wide deck for viewing the top of the jumps?), plus the mechanism and parts for the Skiboggan lift.

It was a fascinating place to find (thanks to Jack Leeper), lifting up old, rusted pieces of metal that could have been part of the state-of-the-art ski lift in the 1940s. We talked of plans to bring down at least one of the sleds for possible display at the pending Washington State Ski and Snowboard Museum.







**Figure 7. The historical search party among rubble at the top of what we think was the Talley-Ho Skiboggan. The temporary conclusion we have come to is that the metal sleds we found there were not the original skiboggans as shown in vintage pictures (such as Figure 3), but instead might be a smaller sled used higher on the slope. More research is needed to figure out this interesting place. Thanks to Jack Leeper of Hyak for finding this “crash site” and leading us there on July 27, 2013.**

Wherever we went that day, any obscure piece of metal or machinery was referred to Steve Allen from Stevens Pass for identification. He related to me how much he enjoyed helping out Sahalie Ski Club a few years ago with rope tow issues, based on his encyclopedic knowledge and mechanical skills. He also noted that he was sad to lose Marla and Dave as renters at his Lake Wenatchee cabin when they obtained their own place nearby. He commented about how wonderful the old ski club is for preserving memories as well as fostering community in the mountains.

All in all, it was a fun day for the ski historians. As noted earlier, this is active, aerobic history as we combed the slopes piecing together the lost ski area and its many artifacts. Kudos to Jack Leeper of Hyak for doing the advance legwork. He’s the go-to guy for details of the evolution of the Snow Bowl/Hyak area.

■ Dave Galvin