

## Sahalie Historical Note # 9: Our Neighbors, Washington Alpine Club

Right across the road from Sahalie Ski Club is a neighbor organization with a history as long and colorful as our own --actually even more so on both counts. The **Washington Alpine Club** was formed in 1916 by a remarkable early character in the outdoor Northwest: Anna Louise Strong. Anna Louise arrived in Seattle that year, a 30-year-old Ph.D., author, outdoor enthusiast and radical. She must have been somewhat intimidating -- a whirlwind in the young pioneer city of Seattle. She immediately organized five summer camping expeditions to Mt. Rainier, each with 40 to 50 participants. This group, known as the **Cooperative Campers**, formed the origins of the Washington Alpine Club.<sup>1</sup>

Anna Louise is credited with the first winter ascent of Mt. Hood, and served as a guide (the first female?) on Mt. Rainier. She was elected to the Seattle School Board, joined the Wobblies as a socialist sympathizer, and editorialized in support of the 1919 general strike. She eventually became so radicalized that she moved first to the Soviet Union and then to China, where she hobnobbed with Mao and was buried with state honors in Beijing when she died there in 1970.<sup>2 3</sup> Quite the character, indeed! Her later exploits were so off the charts that "her name was an anathema to many [Washington Alpine] Club members."<sup>4</sup>



The Cooperative Campers persisted after the founding whirlwind moved on. Renamed the Washington Alpine Club in 1927, it branched out into promotion of hiking, climbing, skiing and all-things-backcountry. The club motto at the time was, "To make our mountains accessible and to encourage a love of simply living in the open air."<sup>5</sup> Who could argue with that?

It appears that members of the Alpine Club were skiing at Snoqualmie Pass as early as the late 1920s. A number of outings are recorded in the local newspapers. An early ski example: "Members of Washington Alpine Club will go by train to Rockdale, then ski to Silver Peak, back to Seattle by 9:30 Sunday evening....[T]hough scaling the 5,650-foot peak is not considered particularly hazardous, only members with previous ski experience will make the excursion."<sup>6</sup> Teams from Washington Alpine Club are credited with winning the Mountaineers' 18-mile Patrol Race between Snoqualmie and Stampede passes in at least some of the years it ran

between 1930 and 1941.<sup>7</sup> In fact, WAC still is in possession of the trophy since it won the race the last time it ran.

There were many “friendly” ski races between the Alpine and Commonwealth/Sahalie clubs throughout the 1930s, usually run on the Guye Peak rock slide. Some of the early ski mountaineering pioneers such as the Loners brothers, Harry and Ed, who as WAC members were involved in early ski ascents of Mt. Baker and other Cascade peaks, also skied in slalom and downhill races representing Commonwealth Ski Club in the early 1930s.

In 1931 (the same year the Commonwealth Ski Club got started on its new lodge at the Pass), WAC members explored purchase of the checkerboard parcel to the west of Commonwealth/Sahalie.<sup>8</sup> A newspaper note in March of 1931 describes a club outing into Denny Basin which skied “over the proposed cabin site of the club.”<sup>9</sup> WAC’s deed to the railroad land is dated the same day (July 15, 1932) as the one which transferred ownership of



the land Sahalie is built on. In 1932, WAC built the rustic lodge which their members call the **Guye Cabin**.<sup>10</sup> The *Seattle Daily Times* reported in its October 23, 1932, edition that Washington Alpine “...recently completed a three and one-half story lodge on Snoqualmie Pass.”<sup>11</sup> As with the Commonwealth/Sahalie lodge, Guye Cabin was for many years only accessible by foot from the state road

to the south, with a small footbridge over Commonwealth Creek just above its junction with the South Fork Snoqualmie River (which runs through the WAC property from its origins at Source Lake above Alpentel). Guye Cabin has been expanded over the years, but is unique at the Pass in being at its core the original structure from 1932; Sahalie’s original lodge, Seattle Ski Club’s original lodge and the Mountaineers’ two lodges at the Pass all burned to the ground at one time or another. Guye Cabin’s capacity is 76 (bunks); its typical weekend use at the time of this writing averages around 30.

An article in the *Seattle Daily Times* in 1933<sup>12</sup> describes some box cars “a few miles beyond Martin [near the Mountaineers’ Meany Hut, at Stampede Pass], which the Washington Alpine Club uses,” as well as “its grand new lodge” at Snoqualmie Pass.

The Washington Alpine property at the Pass extends up the ridge to the north of its cabin and on the far side of the South Fork Snoqualmie, the ridge that forms the eastern flank of Denny Mountain. The pro patrollers at Alpentel refer to this area as “WAC bluff” when they set off avalanche explosives at that end of the ski area.

Night skiing came before lifts. WAC’s Guy Cabin ski course was to be “flooded with light” in the coming winter, announced an article in November, 1940.<sup>13</sup> Alpine developed a rope tow on the lower slope of the bluff right after WWII; the November 17, 1946 *Seattle Daily Times* notes that, “The ski lift under construction on the club’s property at Snoqualmie Pass is nearing completion and should be ready when winter snows blanket the pass.”<sup>14</sup> Members of the two clubs at least periodically would share each other’s tows and ski hills. Current Sahalie members who grew up at the club recall using the “incredibly steep” Alpine rope tow, and the record shows that Alpine members used to come across the valley to buy tow tickets at Sahalie for 50 cents a day in the late 1950s. Jeanne Gue enlisted one of the old Alpine members, John Roalkvam, to be ski instructor on the Sahalie hill in the early 1960s; John eventually joined Sahalie, too, as a member, and his kids names show up in Carnival race lists in the late ‘60s.

In 1948, the Washington Alpine Club joined forces with the Mountaineers and the National Ski Patrol to form the Mountain Rescue Council, a year-round wilderness search and rescue organization. It was the first of its kind in the U.S.<sup>15</sup>

There has been tension between the clubs over the years, more so it seems since the road was built to the new Alpentel development in the mid 1960s. The original parking area that Alpentel agreed to keep plowed for Sahalie was on the Alpine side of the road, so inevitably Alpine members started to use it, too, with occasional flare-ups about who had rightful access. Even today, these parking misunderstandings continue to flare.

Washington Alpine is a wide-ranging outdoor club well regarded especially for its expert classes related to climbing, telemark skiing, wilderness first aide, backcountry camping and other outdoor topics. Its focus is on mountaineering and backcountry travel, more so than on lift-serviced skiing. It does much beyond Snoqualmie Pass, yet has its “jewel” in the Guye Cabin next to Sahalie.<sup>16</sup>

- Dave Galvin, January 2011

[updated 1/31/2011]

[As with any of these historical notes, if you have comments, corrections, additions or stories to tell, we'd love to hear them. Get in touch.]

Read more about Anna Louise Strong at: <http://www.wacweb.org/About/history.view> ; at Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna\\_Louise\\_Strong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_Louise_Strong) ; or at the U.W. site for information about the 1919 General Strike: <http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/strike/jackson.shtml> .

# New Alpine Club Historian: She's Really Fit for Post

By SALLY GENE MAHONEY

Margaret McKenzie is historian of the Washington Alpine Club — an appropriate post.

Appropriate? You bet! She's the only active charter member of the outdoors group, which Saturday will celebrate its 50th anniversary.

Active? Uh huh! Mrs. McKenzie doesn't look her years (74 of them) or move like a woman who only recently decided not to go out on extensive hikes — "I don't want to be a drag."

Hikes? Yup! She still hikes short distances, though, like from her house in the Latona District to the University District, and back, and nine blocks uphill and two blocks over to the grocery store. "I don't have a car and it's too much trouble to go by bus."



MRS. H. W. MCKENZIE, WHO REMEMBERS WHEN . . .

WELL, YOU get the idea. Mrs. McKenzie is far from the rocking-chair stage. She's been moving all of her life and she's not about to slow down now.

Her memories of 50 years ago are of the interesting variety — in 1916 she climbed Mount Rainier (in Navy-serge bloomers) by the now little-used and hazardous Gibraltar route; she's hiked from Cowen Park to near Oak Lake School (a good three miles as the crow flies) without passing more than a handful of houses, and then there were the two trains and bus one had to take to get to Paradise on Mount Rainier.

She remembers, too, the woman who was responsible for the Washington Alpine Club's beginning — the now notorious Anna Louise Strong, the recalled Seattle School Board member who went on to become a leftist writer, Communist sympathizer and resident now of Red China.

FIFTY YEARS ago, Miss Strong, now 81, tried to interest city officials in establishing a city-owned camping facility at Paradise. Failing that, in the summer of 1916 she called a meeting of community-service groups which might be interested in such a camp.

A cooperative camp was set up and Mrs. McKenzie and her brother camped there for two weeks. In September of that year, all of the campers had a reunion at which it was decided that they would organize a club for the purpose of keeping fit by hiking around Seattle.

The group was named Cooperative Campers and, in 1923, the name was changed to the present one. Never a large group, the club today has some 300 members and maintains a cabin near the Snoqualmie Pass summit.

Mrs. McKenzie remembers Miss Strong (who has had no connection with the club for nearly the 50 years) as a very interesting person on the trail.

"She was always a liberal," she said, "and always

trying to help young people who were just starting out. When she spoke here some years ago, I went to hear her—but she didn't remember me."

MRS. MCKENZIE—who no longer skis—said she doesn't like ski tows.

"I'd rather climb up the hill by myself anytime. Back before the tows, some had fancy fur climbers to attach to the bottoms of their skis. I used a rope.

"Of course, skis weren't easy to come by. When we began skiing, you couldn't buy a pair in Seattle. We sent to Minneapolis for them and got a bundle of a dozen at a time."

Let's you think that Mrs. McKenzie, because she doesn't ski or take long hikes any more, is just relaxing. She isn't.

Last summer, she participated in the club's summer outing, a week-long camping trip beyond Stehekin, at the head of Lake Chelan; afternoons, she helps care for an elderly woman for several hours and she's busy making religious bookmarks for her church bazaar.

Mrs. McKenzie, a widow, attended the University of Washington, taught for several years, and is a retired bookkeeper.

The club's anniversary celebration Saturday will be a dinner at 6:30 o'clock at The Windjammer, and will include the installation of new officers.

Dee Molenaar, mountain climber, will give an illustrated talk on the "Climbing History of Mount Rainier" and also show some of his paintings.

The new officers include James E. Mason, Jr., president; Robert Riddell, Roy W. Rice, Edgar D. Bauch and Miss Virginia Wyatt.

Handling arrangements are the Mesdames Emil Danishek, Donald A. Tice, Mary Lou Boyko, Karl Petterson and Bauch.

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<sup>1</sup> Sally Jean Mahoney, 1966, "New Alpine Club Historian: She's Really Fit For Post," *Seattle Daily Times*, November 13, 1966, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> Owen Alloway, (no date), "Anna Louise Strong and the Founding of the WAC," historical summary on-line at: <http://www.wacweb.org/About/history.view> .

<sup>3</sup> "Anna Louise Strong," Wikipedia article, at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna\\_Louise\\_Strong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_Louise_Strong) .

<sup>4</sup> Alloway, same link.

<sup>5</sup> "Alpine Club Members To Keep Busy," *Seattle Daily Times*, November 16, 1927, p. 30.

<sup>6</sup> "Alpine Members Plan Ski Party," *Seattle Daily Times*, January 31, 1930, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Lowell Skoog, 2004, Chasing History: Snoqualmie to Stampede Pass – The Mountaineers Patrol Race, on-line history published at: <http://www.alpenglow.org/skiing/patrol-race-2004/index.html> .

<sup>8</sup> WAC ended up purchasing a total of 49.2 acres in one large quarter-quarter section plus two small lots just west of the valley floor.

<sup>9</sup> "Alpine Club Set For Scout Outing into Denny Basin," *Seattle Daily Times*, March 6, 1931, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> "Building For Winter (photo)," *Seattle Daily Times*, October 17, 1932, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> "Alpine Clubmen Elect Officers," *Seattle Daily Times*, October 23, 1932, p. 20.

<sup>12</sup> Virginia Boren, 1933, "Practice Yodeling, For Ski Days Are at Hand: Skiing High, Skiing Low," *Seattle Daily Times*, November 10, 1933, p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> "Washington Alpine Club Proud of Run," *Seattle Daily Times*, November 13, 1940, p. 33.

<sup>14</sup> Bob Twiss, 1946, "Class A Ski Set for Mt. Hood Jan. 19: Downhill and Slalom Events On Schedule," *Seattle Daily Times*, November 17, 1946, p. 42.

<sup>15</sup> Glenn Drosendahl, 2010, "Bauer, Wolf G. (b. 1912)," HistoryLink essay, on-line at:

[http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.historylink.org/db\\_images/Wolf-Bauer-Winning-Ski-Race-1933.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm%3FDisplayPage%3Doutput.cfm%26file\\_id%3D9440&h=391&w=260&sz=28&tbnid=YNqbRSdFfBqhwM:&tbnh=123&tbnw=82&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dwolf%2Bbauer&zoom=1&q=wolf+bauer&hl=en&usq=tDr-W3y\\_OUmn4MRW0l0koBu7CYY=&sa=X&ei=437tTKnTBIf6swOgluS4Dw&ved=0CCYQ9QEwBQ](http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.historylink.org/db_images/Wolf-Bauer-Winning-Ski-Race-1933.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm%3FDisplayPage%3Doutput.cfm%26file_id%3D9440&h=391&w=260&sz=28&tbnid=YNqbRSdFfBqhwM:&tbnh=123&tbnw=82&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dwolf%2Bbauer&zoom=1&q=wolf+bauer&hl=en&usq=tDr-W3y_OUmn4MRW0l0koBu7CYY=&sa=X&ei=437tTKnTBIf6swOgluS4Dw&ved=0CCYQ9QEwBQ)

<sup>16</sup> "About the Washington Alpine Club (WAC)," on-line at: <http://www.wacweb.org/About/default.view> .