

Sahalie Historical Note #3: Early Skiing at Snoqualmie Pass

Seattle Turn Verein members started coming to Snoqualmie Pass to ski probably in the 1920s. As noted in Sahalie's general history summarized on our website, if they drove from Seattle, they could usually only get as far as what is now Denny Creek Campground, and would "skin" up the old road from there to the present-day summit. It wasn't until the 1931-32 season that the state attempted to keep the road open through the winter.

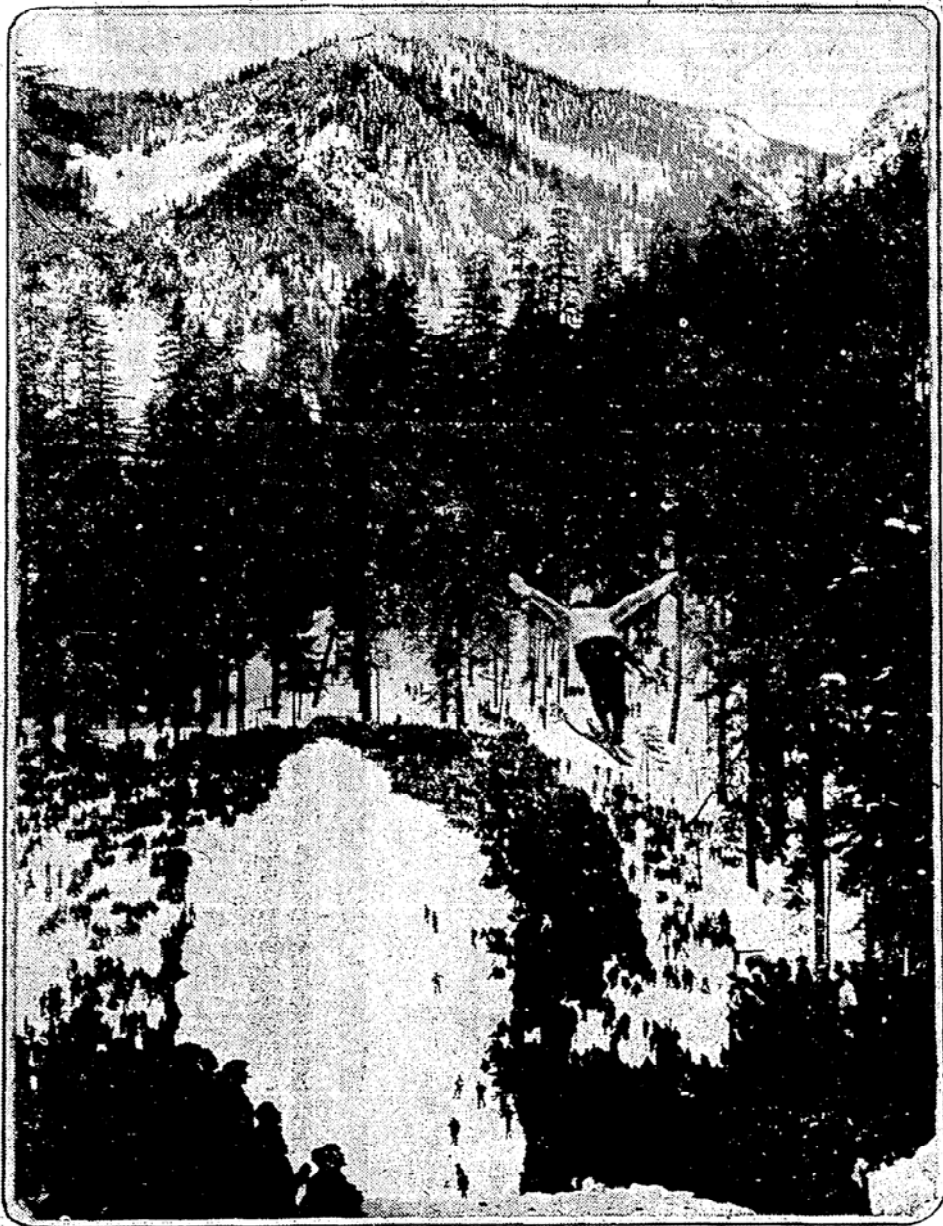
Before that, direct winter access was by train, and the train continued to be a popular way to get to the Pass all through the 1930s and '40s. The Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad line (more commonly known as the "Milwaukee Road") opened over the top of the Pass in 1909.¹ The summit station for the railroad was known as Laconia. That line experienced a lot of problems staying open in the winter dealing with the volumes of snowfall, plus avalanche and landslide issues with the tracks. A tunnel was built under the summit, opening up a more protected line in 1915, but without direct access to the summit of the Pass.² The western portal to the tunnel had a stop known as Rockdale; the Mountaineers built a cabin uphill of this stop in 1914.³ The eastern portal of the tunnel was at Hyak.

The Mountaineers hosted ski tournaments from their Snoqualmie Lodge above Rockdale as early as 1922.⁴ Beginning in 1930 they sponsored an 18-20 mile overland race called the Patrol Race from the Snoqualmie Lodge to their Meany Lodge at Martin, Stampede Pass. (Members of Commonwealth Ski Club fielded 3-man teams some years.⁵) For a map of this race's 18-mile route, see <http://www.alpenglow.org/skiing/patrol-race-2004/map-2004.html>.

The Seattle Ski Club was formed in 1929 and built a lodge in 1931 near the summit road. This club was primarily (exclusively?) made up of Norwegians (an early newspaper article referred to the club as "including almost the whole Norwegian colony"⁶). Their main interest was ski jumping, although they "cross-country" skied using the flexible-heel equipment of the day, and employed Telemark technique to get downhill.

Seattle Ski Club built the first ski jumps, uphill from their lodge, at Beaver Lake (at the saddle in the ridge between present day Dodge Ridge and West Side chair lifts). Their first "Class A" wooden jump was considered quite formidable, "with one of the steepest landings in the world – a hill three or four degrees steeper than the famous Hollmenkollen Hill in Norway."⁷ They held the first ski jumping tournament in the area there in February, 1930.⁸ This was huge and attracted many spectators. In fact, it is worth noting that the first skiing at the Pass was primarily a spectator sport: a lot of visitors walked up hill through thick forest at what is now called "Summit West" to watch a few crazy ski jumpers. Seattle Ski Club was a prime sponsor of

Stretching Out, and Going Far!



No one had heard of him until this year
but Northwest ski jumping was given
added impetus yesterday at Snoqualmie Pass

when John Elvrum, 22-year-old Norse entrant
of the Cascade Ski Club, Portland, leaped 179
and 180 feet with almost perfect form.

Ski jumper on Seattle Ski Club's Beaver Lake jump, from *Seattle Daily Times*, March 2, 1931, p. 14.

JUMPING NEW CABIN COMPLETED

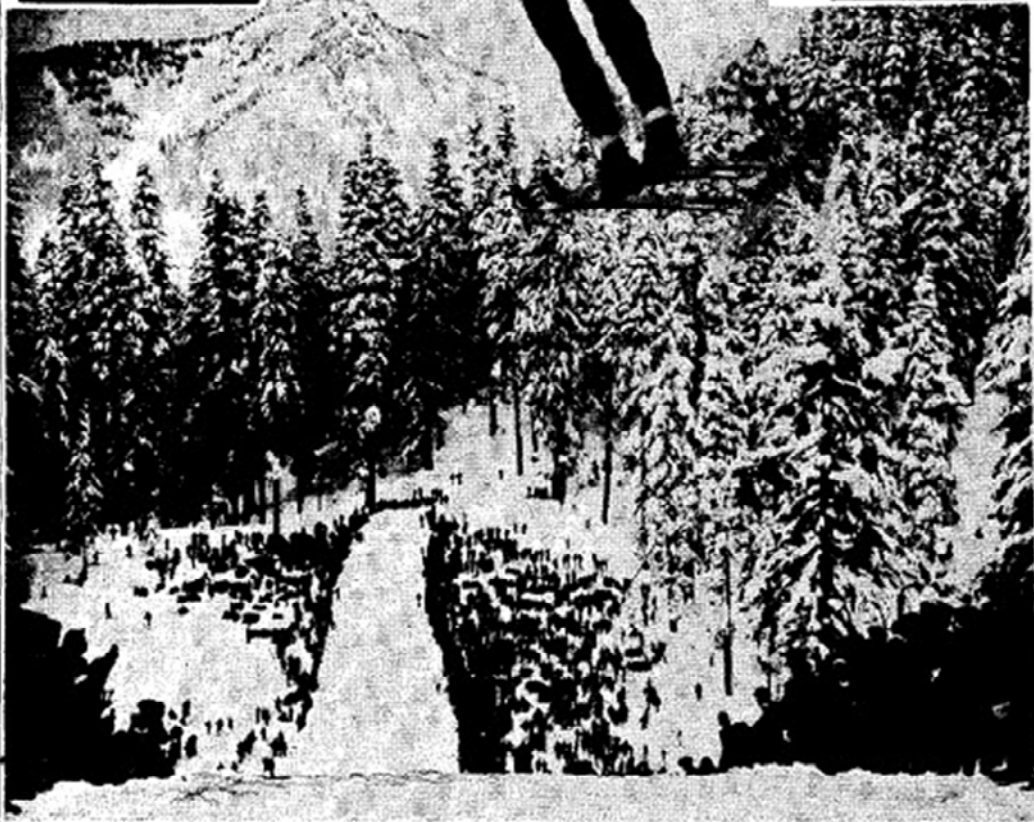
from Seattle is the summit of
ie summit of Snoqualmie Pass is
that next year will be complete.
plans will become reality:
ng hill, this side of the huge Olympic
St. A comfortable cabin for skiers who
rt-

HE'S ON THE AIR



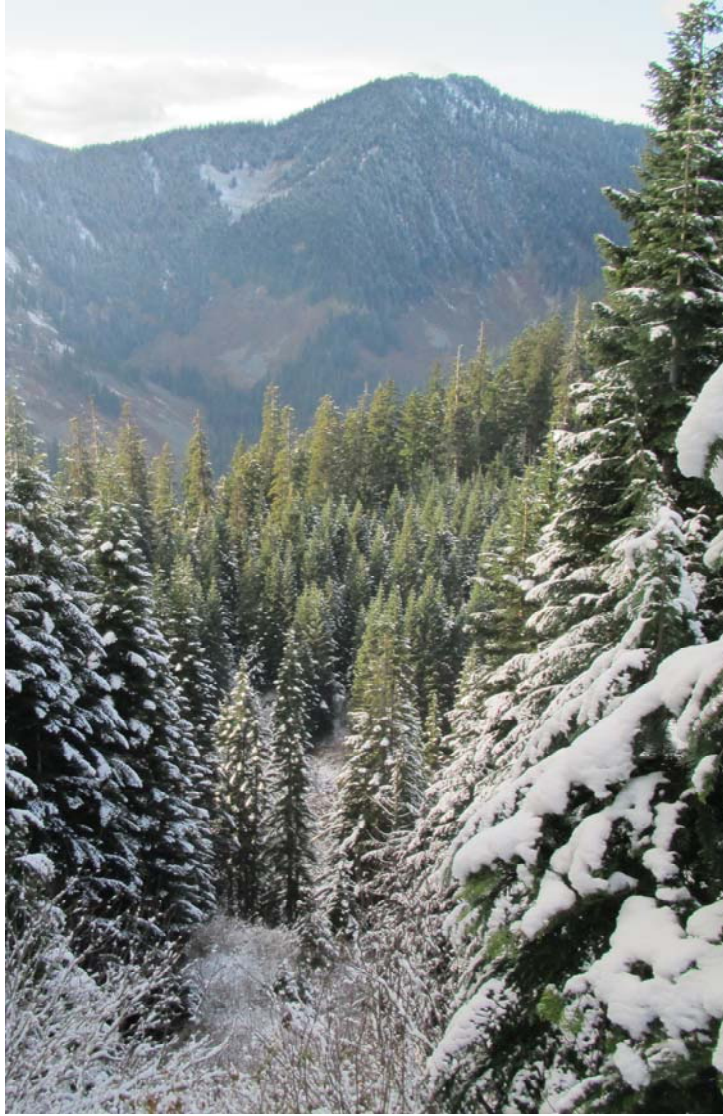
YEAR BOO! NORTHWE BOOST I

Clip sheets from the Natl
The Times yesterday—and alti
pote (they'd run like this—12
they gave conclusive indication that
Washington skiing has been a loss.
For instance, culling from "T



It's skiing time in Snoqualmie Pass, with a heavy fall of snow; feet, from stem (which is the takeoff) to stern (which is what would
and big Hermod Bakke of Leavenworth, Northwest Class A ski-jumping be your point of landing if you tried it). Jumping is but a bit of Sno-
champion, is doing a silent broadcast—and what a cut! Two hundred quialmie Pass skiing, however—drive up some day, and look around.

Ski jumper on Seattle Ski Club's Beaver Lake jump, from the *Seattle Daily Times*, December 8, 1935, p. 23.
(Note the same camera aspect, same trees and mountain in background as in the previous, 1931, photo. I
think this is Low Mountain in the background, on the west side of Denny Creek, looking Northwest from
Beaver Lake.)



I think this is the same view as in the previous two newspaper photos, 80 years later, from near the top of the old Thunderbird lift at Snoqualmie's Summit West, looking down toward Beaver Lake and out in a northwesterly direction toward Low Mountain in the background. I haven't found any remnants (footings, whatever) of the old jumps. Photo by Dave Galvin, taken 11/6/2011.

ski jumps and ski races at the Pass all through the 1930s and '40s. They attracted world-class jumpers and held regional and even national competitions.

In 1937 Olav Ulland emigrated from Norway to Seattle and immediately joined his Norwegian comrades at Seattle Ski Club. He was already a world-famous ski jumper, the first person in the world to jump 100 meters (his mark, at Point de Legno, Italy, in 1937, was 339 feet!). He helped to organize and coach jumping for many years thereafter, and attracted many world-class jumpers such as his buddy Birger Ruud to come through Snoqualmie Pass to compete. His descriptions of jumps are wonderful to read, especially considering English was not his native language. Here is a link worth examining: <http://hyak.net/lost/skijumping.html> .

[Olav Ulland opened his ski and sporting-goods stores in Seattle together with slalom champ Scott Osborn beginning in 1941, when a local guy by the name of Eddie Bauer loaned them \$1,000 to get started. Osborn and Ulland stores were a local sporting goods mainstay until 1995. Olav was elected to the U.S. Ski Hall of Fame in 1981.⁹]

Seattle Ski Club was the preeminent skiing organization in the early '30s, not only for its tournaments at Snoqualmie Pass but also for sponsoring events and fielding competitive racers throughout the region. One of the club's earliest presidents was Cornelius "Charles" Hageman, Eva Hageman Boyle's father and Steve Boyle's grandfather. Steve reports that his mom was a good friend of Olav Ulland.

It is worth noting also that, in the '20s and '30s as these early ski pioneers started showing up, Snoqualmie Pass was completely forested, with huge, old-growth timber interspersed with 30-year-old second growth after the first wave of timber-cutting came over the Pass about 1890. The skiing that the Seattle Ski Club members started out with was cross-country using linked Telemark turns in thick forest or the occasional glades. The early slalom races that the Commonwealth Ski Club hosted near its forest-edge lodge were set on the Guye Peak rock slide slope to the north of the lodge. The open slopes that we take for granted today throughout the Pass area were the result of a lot of hard work in the later 1930s and beyond.

Interest in skiing really began to take off in the early 1930s. A *Seattle Daily Times* article in January, 1932, referred to the "new skiing hysteria... the whole world seems suddenly to have 'gone' skiing."¹⁰

In 1933/'34 crews from the Civil Works Administration cleared a small section of trees at the summit in order to promote skiing there.¹¹ The site was then used for skiing by the Seattle Parks Department. It was called Municipal Hill: no lift, but an open slope to slide down after herringboning or walking up. The city gave up this operation in 1940 because it was considered too far removed from the city boundaries for the city's Parks Department to manage.



Skiers at Municipal Hill, Snoqualmie Pass Summit, c. 1936. Photo by A.N. Nickols, from City of Seattle Archives, Item No.

30384 (<http://clerk.ci.seattle.wa.us/~scripts/nph-brs.exe?s1=skiing&S2=&S3=&l=100&Sect7=THUMBON&Sect6=HITOFF&Sect5=PHOT1&Sect4=AND&Sect3=PLURON&d=PHO2&p=1&u=%2F%7Epublic%2Fphot1.htm&r=17&f=G>)

In January, 1938, the Milwaukee Railroad (Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific) opened the “Snoqualmie Ski Bowl” at Hyak at the eastern portal of its train tunnel.¹² Trees were cleared for some open slopes, and a “Sun Valley type” ski lift using a cable and hand holds was installed to assist skiers 300 vertical feet up the slope. Five runs ran down the bowl, named for Milwaukee Road’s best-known trains at the time: the Hiawatha, Chippewa, Arrow, Pioneer and Olympian. Stumps were still an issue on these slopes – the terrain in light snow was reported to be “bumpy” at best. The railroad ran daily ski trains on Saturdays and Sundays from Seattle and Tacoma (“Let the Engineer do the Driving,” said its ads). Daily use exceeded 1,000 passengers!¹³ Demand was so great that “the first night ski train in American history” was put into service on Friday nights, beginning January 14, 1938; “an orchestra will be aboard,” said the announcement.¹⁴ The lights installed at the Ski Bowl probably represented the first night skiing in Washington state at a commercial ski area (spotlights had been used at Paradise to

promote night skiing as early as 1933). Class A, B and C ski jumps were constructed at the Ski Bowl. The first major ski jumping competitions there started in 1940, when the “Olympian Hill” ski jump was opened.^{15 16} Olav Ulland and the Seattle Ski Club were key partners in developing and running the Ski Bowl’s jumps (in addition to their own at Beaver Lake at the Summit).

Web Moffett showed up on the scene in 1937 as well. He was the first employee of Ski Lifts, Inc., which cut a deal with the Seattle Parks Department to install a small rope tow at the Municipal Hill clearing. In 1940 the city transferred ownership of the area to Ski Lifts, Inc., and the name was changed to Snoqualmie Summit Ski Area. After the war, in 1945, lights were installed there. By the ‘47/’48 season the Summit was operating 5 rope tows.

After the war, the railroad re-opened its operations at Hyak, changing the name to the Milwaukee Ski Bowl so as not to be confused with the Snoqualmie Summit. It installed a new surface lift called the Talley-Ho Ski-Boggan that could carry 1400 skiers per hour.¹⁷ In 1947 it hosted the Olympic ski jump trials (in preparation for the 1948 winter Olympics in St. Moritz), and the National Ski Jumping Championships in March of 1948. These events were big deals, and brought a lot of attention to the area. But after its lodge burned in late 1949, the railroad operated the Ski Bowl for another year or two and then got out of the ski area business. Other owners ran the area intermittently after that.

In 1948 a new ski area opened up between the Summit and Ski Bowl, boasting the first chair lift in Washington state. The area was called Ski Acres.

Alpentel began operations in the 1967/’68 winter season. I’ll describe that start-up in a separate historical note. I’ll also elaborate on the early Seattle SC’s jumping tournaments and other interesting details in later notes.

A Seattle Daily Times article in late 1935 commented that, “...it was in Snoqualmie Pass that modern skiing [in the Northwest, or at least in Washington] was really born and raised.”¹⁸ Sahalie Ski Club has played an important role in that birthing and raising. Here’s to the modern skiing future at the Pass, at least until global warming makes it of historical interest only!

- Dave Galvin

[Updated 3/26/2012]

[As in all of these historical notes for the Sahalie Ski Club, if readers have any comments, corrections, additions or stories to tell, let me know at galvind53@gmail.com – I plan to keep updating this archive.]



Photo of jumping competition and poster from Milwaukee Road Ski Bowl jumping championships in the 1940s (origins unknown).



The Talley-Ho Ski-Boggan at Milwaukee Ski Bowl (Hyak), c. 1947 (origin of photo unknown).

¹ There was passenger service over the top of Snoqualmie Pass as early as June 10, 1909 ("C., M. & P.S. Makes Change in Schedule," *Seattle Daily Times*, June 10, 1909, p.15). The first freight train to run over the Pass all the way from Chicago to Seattle was on June 25, 1909 ("Coming of C., M. & P.S. Ry. Significant Event," *Seattle Daily Times*, July 11, 1909, p. 35.).

² "New Tunnel Will Be Opened in One Week," *Seattle Daily Times*, January 17, 1915, p. 15.

³ "Mountaineers to Dedicate Lodge: Special Train Will Carry 250 Members to Open New Building at Rockdale, Near Snoqualmie Pass," *Seattle Daily Times*, June 21, 1914, p. 8.

⁴ Lowell Skoog, 2002, Alpenglöw Ski Mountaineering History Project, on-line at: <http://www.alpenglow.org/ski-history/chronology/snoqualmie.html> .

⁵ "Ski Patrol Race Tough: Mountaineer Team Takes First Place," *Seattle Daily Times*, February 28, 1938, p. 14.

⁶ "Whence Goes Western Haut Monde for Skiing," *Seattle Daily Times*, January 25, 1931, p. 25.

⁷ "Whence Goes...". If you hike south on the Pacific Crest Trail today to the top of the Snoqualmie Summit West ridge, you come to Beaver Lake. Look to your left and you can appreciate the slope of the landing there. I can find no traces of the old jump on the upper parts of that slope, yet the open slope seems inviting....

⁸ Lowell Skoog, 2002.

⁹ U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame and Museum, https://www.skihall.com/index.php? a=document&doc_id=11&id=335 , accessed 11-2-2011.

¹⁰ Alex Shults, 1932, "It Isn't News, But --!," *Seattle Daily Times*, January 17, 1932, p. 24.

¹¹ The instigator appears to have been Theodore Bordsen, who reported at the inaugural meeting of the Seattle Ski Council on December 14, 1933, that the Forest Service had agreed to grant the Seattle Park Board a large tract adjacent to the Seattle Ski Club, and that 40 men had begun clearing a mile-long, half-mile-wide area; "New Ski Group Formed; Giese Made Chairman," *Seattle Daily Times*, December 15, 1933, p. 27.

¹² "Thousands Take to Ski Fields During Weekend," *Seattle Daily Times*, January 3, 1938, p. 14; "Skiing Throng Tries Out New Snoqualmie Bowl Today," *Seattle Daily Times*, January 8, 1938, p. 9.

¹³ Heather MacIntosh, 2000, "Milwaukee Ski Bowl," HistoryLink article #1685, on-line at:
http://www.historylink.org/content/prINTER_friendly/pf_output.cfm?file_id=1685 .

¹⁴ "Snow Returns to State Ski Fields," *Seattle Daily Times*, January 12, 1938, p. 16.

¹⁵ "To Jump 300 Feet? Olympian Hill Offers Chance," *Seattle Daily Times*, February 20, 1940, p. 17.

¹⁶ "Ski Bowl Hill Makes Debut Tomorrow; Competition Sponsored by Seattle Club," *Seattle Daily Times*, February 21, 1940, p. 11.

¹⁷ Bob Twiss, 1946, "Penguin Meet Heads Set; 5-Man Teams to Compete: Slalom Event Due Jan. 5 At Stevens Pass," *Seattle Daily Times*, December 8, 1946, p. 53.

¹⁸ "Snoqualmie Pass Ski Projects Total \$50,000: Modern Jumping Hill, New Cabin To Be Completed," *Seattle Daily Times*, December 8, 1935, p. 23.