

Confusion?

November, 2008

*A journal of ideas, thought and
opinion*

Issue No. 2

Lost Ski Areas of Washington

Cle Elum Ski Hill (1921-1934)

Cle Elum sits in the Washington Cascades about 80 miles east of Seattle, just off of I-90. It holds the distinction of having the first organized ski area west of Colorado. The area was located between Cle Elum and Teanaway. Today, Teanaway is the junction of State Route 970 and State Route 10. The ski hill was operated by an individual named

John Bresko who was president of the ski club. According to articles in the *Cle Elum Miner Echo*, the Kiwanis Club also operated a ski area in Cle Elum, as well.

The area featured three jumps and a two story lodge. There was also a 12' by 100' shed with tables and six stoves for food service. Throughout the area's life, between 100 and 400 people were on the hill every weekend.

Cle Elum featured ski jumping events during the winter. The first event was held at the Kiwanis ski area in 1924. An event in 1925 attracted 2000 spectators. Published accounts show that several thousand people attended the jumping events every year. One event in 1931 had an estimated 8000 spectators, the largest known crowd at one of the events. Another reported event was a freak tournament, which was supposed to have happened for several years. The event included obstacle races as well as races in costumes. The winners received cash prizes. (Warren Miller has featured similar modern-day events in his yearly ski films.)

Fans would arrive by train, either from Yakima or Seattle. In 1931, the State of Washington opened the highway over Snoqualmie Pass, which allowed people to drive as well as take the train.

The operators had challenges getting spectators to the site. One way was through a Northern Pacific Railway tramway which opened in 1931. The tramway ran through a coal mine shaft which ended near the ski jumps. To get to



Ski jumping at Cle Elum

the jumps, the fans rode in trucks to the mine shaft. They boarded mine cars and were pulled through the mine with a hoist. This method worked all right as long as the passengers didn't stand up while riding in the mine cars. One lady did stand up while riding the tram and received a scalp wound. She was treated and was able to ride home.

Another way to get to the ski jumps was to ride sleds which were pulled by tractors. (Today, Crystal Mountain uses a similar method. They operate tractor-towed sleds that carry skiers from the parking lots to the lodge area.)

In 1924, John Bresko attempted to buy land at Snoqualmie Summit for a winter sports area; however the banks refused to loan claiming that the area wouldn't be profitable. They cited a lack of transportation as being an issue.

John Bresko had plans to further develop the area and was prepared to install an aerial tramway which was to be built by the Northern Pacific. But the tram was never built. Development was beginning at Snoqualmie Pass, and a Seattle Ski Club tournament attracted 10,000 spectators. The last recorded event in Cle Elum was in 1933 with a crowd of 2,500. The event, though, was marred by high winds. There are no records of any events in 1934. By 1934, the party ended in Cle Elum as the depression ended skiing and the events at the ski hill.

Credits

www.hyak.com
Lowell Skoog, www.alpenglow.org
www.historylink.org
Cle Elum Miner-Echo

About this publication

Confusion? is an occasional publication and is produced by the Snoqualmie Ridge Press, Frank Hansche, prop., for family, friends, and members of the AAPA and NAPA. The typefaces used: nameplate, 36 point Goudy; body, 10 point Century; headlines, 12 Century and Century Italic. To comment on this publication, please contact:

Frank Hansche
Snoqualmie Ridge Press
7103 Allman Ave SE
Snoqualmie, WA 98065