

Confusion?

February, 2008

A journal of ideas, thought and opinion

Issue No. 3

Washington's Lost Ski Areas

Paradise at Mt. Rainier



Yes, people did ski on Mt. Rainier. In fact, skiing began on Mt. Rainier in 1923 and skiers continued to hit the mountain until 1975 when the park service suspended downhill skiing in the park.

Mt. Rainier is one of several Cascade peaks that rise more than 10,000 feet. At over 14,000 feet, the mountain dominates views in Western Washington. It can also be seen from I-90 near Ellensburg and on I-82 on the way to Yakima. Paradise and Mt. Baker vie for record snowfall amounts, with each having held the world's record for annual snowfall. Average snow depth ranged between 15 and 30 feet. The 1949 *Sportsman's Guide* described skiing conditions this way:

Skiing Conditions: Fine snow usually found at Paradise and adjacent terrain from November through May. Higher elevation offers some of the worlds finest spring skiing on granular snow, and provides unique snow for summer enthusiasts, making Rainier a year-round mecca. One short tow for public at Paradise operated by Ski Lifts, Inc. Scenic trails to other points such as Panorama Point, Sugar Loaf and Camp Muir high on the side of Mt Rainier.

With skiing conditions like these, lots of people were attracted to the slopes of Rainier. The well-known skier, Otto Lang, taught skiing at Paradise for many years. The Union Pacific Railroad seriously considered Paradise as a destination resort before finally settling on Sun Valley, Idaho.

At the height of skiing at Paradise, the area had six rope tows for uphill transportation. By 1975, capacity was just a single rope tow. There was never a chair lift at Paradise; the last proposals for chair lifts were offered in 1968. In addition, the rope tows were never permanent either. The tows were taken down at the end of each season. During the off-season, markers

were placed to show the position of the lift standards.

Even though there was a long tradition of alpine (downhill) skiing on Mt. Rainier, the park administration felt that cross-country (Nordic) skiing was a more appropriate park use. In addition, two new ski areas, White Pass and Crystal Mountain, had opened and skiers began favoring those areas over the lesser developed Paradise. The park service never operated the ski area. Instead, concessionaires operated the lifts and snack bar. The operators found it difficult to make a profit.

In 1966, one operating company, the Kendall Corporation, ended up filing for bankruptcy. The park sued and received the rope tow equipment in the final settlement. Other concessionaires tried to operate the tow, but it continued to be a marginal operation.

From 1972 to 1975, Paradise Ski Tows operated the lift on a year to year permit. The company finally folded in 1975, ending commercial skiing on Mt. Rainier. As a footnote, people still ski at the mountain but hike up instead of using a lift. A lift shack is the only reminder that lifts even existed on Mt. Rainier.

Area Statistics

Vertical Drop	750'
Top	6,250'
Base	5,500'
Lifts	6 Rope Tows
Average Snow Depth.	15-30 Feet
Note:	Later years reduced to a single tow.

Credits

www.hyak.com,
www.alpenglow.org, Lowell Skoog
www.historylink.org

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 Bodoni Black; body, 10 point Century; headlines, 12 point Century Bold and 14 point Century Italic. To comment on this publication, please contact:

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