

Confusion?

October, 2008

A journal of ideas, thought and opinion

Issue No. 1

Lost Ski Areas of Washington

Forward

I used to downhill ski and really loved the sport. But, after a couple of accidents and some other issues, I had to hang up my downhill skis in favor of cross-country (Nordic) skiing. As luck would have it, I have only been skiing a few times since I bought my cross-country gear. I still love Alpine skiing, though, and I still like going to the ski resort, even if I don't ski. Between the people, the vistas, the technology of the lifts and everything else you see or smell at the resort, I love it all. First, I was going to write a series on Washington ski areas. Then, I became interested in lost ski areas. These are resorts, runs and ski hills that existed in years past, and ceased operating for a variety of reasons.

This series is loosely based on a series of articles called *Lost Ski Areas* written by The Colorado Skier. The articles were distributed by email during the early days of the Internet and now exist as a web log.

My goal in writing this series is to share my love of the mountains, snow, skiing, and a piece of Washington State history. Although many of my readers may not share my love of the sport, I'm hoping you'll find the history interesting enough to follow the series. These articles are also based upon the work of other people, so proper attribution will follow each article. After all, I need to give credit where credit is due!

For those unfamiliar with the Pacific Northwest, here's a quick bit of geography. It should give you an understanding of why skiing can be a hit-or-miss proposition in Washington State.

The states of Oregon and Washington are mountainous states with several mountain ranges in each state. Washington is home to the Olympic Mountains west of the Puget Sound region. Both Washington and Oregon share the Cascade Range, which splits each state roughly in half. Our weather patterns flow from west to east, so fronts hit the coast first, flow around the Olympics and back up

against the Cascades. This flow creates three distinct regions of very wet, wet and desert. The Washington Coast can receive up to 100 inches of rain per year, while the Puget Sound Region receives about 40 inches. Eastern Washington receives less than half that amount, with some areas only getting five inches a year!

Because the Cascades are low, the passes are at low elevations, too. Snoqualmie Pass lies at about 3000 feet with Stevens Pass and White Pass both being about 4500 feet. Contrast these elevations with those of the legendary Colorado resorts which are typically at 10,000 feet or above. In fact, the city of Denver, at a mile above sea level, sits anywhere from one to two thousand feet above the bases of several Washington ski areas. Snow levels average about 3000 feet, but can vary between 2500 feet and 4000 feet during the course of a normal winter. Even long established Cascade ski areas have suffered through poor snow years. One area, Hyak, is running the risk of being lost.

This Month's Lost Areas: Snoqualmie Ski Bowl and Mt. Pilchuck

Snoqualmie Ski Bowl

In 1937, the Chicago, Milwaukee, St Paul and Pacific Railroad developed the Snoqualmie Ski Bowl. It was proposed as a ski area accessible by train, so skiers wouldn't have to deal with the hazards of winter driving. Milwaukee Road executives were convinced of the idea and in the fall of 1937 they built a lodge, a 1,400' ski lift (along with other miscellaneous facilities) in the Hyak area of Snoqualmie Pass. Over 11,000 people visited the Snoqualmie Ski Bowl during the 10 weeks of operation in 1937 to 1938.

During the first winter the ski area facilities and runs were rough due to the short development time, but improvements were made during the summer of 1938.

The ski area sat roughly near where Summit East (Hyak) is today. According to a map of the area, the ski bowl was next to the modern ski area, but didn't encompass it. The

area operated from 1937 to 1942 when it closed because of the outbreak of World War II.

In 1946, after the war, the railroad reopened the resort as the Milwaukee Ski Bowl and operated it until 1951. The name was changed to avoid confusion with the Snoqualmie Summit ski area, another ski area at the Pass.

The area boasted the state's first ski lift which was installed in 1937. At one time, "MSB" was the largest ski jump in North America. In 1947, the resort hosted the Olympic Ski Jumping trials. The resort installed a "Ski-Boggan" ski lift in 1946. The lift could carry over 1400 people per hour as opposed to the normal 300 people per hour by chair lift. The Ski-Boggan was unique in that it could "download" skiers as well as bring them up the hill.

Milwaukee Ski Bowl suffered a major disaster in 1949 when the base lodge burned. In the last two years of its life, the resort operated out of railroad cars that served as the base lodge. Due to increasing expenses of train operation and competition from other areas at the Pass, the railroad shut down the resort after the 1950/51 ski season.

Area Statistics

Vertical Drop:	1,500'
Top:	4,000'
Base:	2,500'
Lifts:	1 Ski-Boggan, 8 Tows

Mt. Pilchuck

The Mt. Pilchuck Ski Area was built in 1956 in the Cascade Mountains east of the city of Everett. In 1951, the Mt. Pilchuck Ski Club had received a permit to build a ski hill at Mt. Pilchuck; however, it is unknown whether any facilities were ever built.

In 1956, the new Pilchuck Ski Area built a rope tow. Later, in 1958, they built a day lodge. By 1963, the area had three rope tows, and added its first chairlift in 1963. A lower chairlift was added in 1967, which gave the area one of the largest vertical rises in Washington.

Mt. Pilchuck had varying terrain like that of Mt. Baker, but the runs weren't as long. The upper area had interesting and varied natural terrain. Pilchuck was described as a mini Mt. Baker, but with the "iffy" weather of Snoqualmie Pass.

Problems for the area began in 1958 when the ski area was absorbed into the Mt. Pilchuck State Park. The area also suffered through several lean snow years, as well as years of too much snow. Part of the snow problem was due to the area's relatively low elevation. As a result, during many seasons, the area couldn't operate. Internecine fighting between state agencies also contributed to the area's demise. Mt. Pilchuck last operated in 1978. Afterward, the chair lifts were removed and sold to other ski areas. Some remnants such as tower bases are all that's left of the area.

Area Statistics

Vertical Drop	1,800'
Top	4,300'
Base	2,500'
Lifts	2 Riblet double chairs, 4 Rope tows
Average Snow Depth	10-12 feet.

Credits

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

About this publication

Confusion? is an occasional publication of the Snoqualmie Ridge Press, Frank Hansche, prop., for family, friends, and members of the AAPA and NAPA. Typesetting is done in Word 2003, and printed on an HP Laserjet.

The typefaces used in this publication are 36 point Goudy for the nameplate; 10 point Century for the body; and 12 point and 14 point Century Italic for the headlines. To comment on this publication, please contact:

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