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THE HISTORY OF SKIING IN CANAAN VALLEY

The first known use of skis was in Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia 4500-5000 years ago. Archeologists have dated skis found in bogs and marshes from that era as well as a 4000 year-old rock carving of a skier found in Norway. In a 1200 A.D. report of the Norwegian civil war, King Sverre sent two scouts on skis to carry the infant royal son, Haakon Haakonson, over the mountains in the middle of winter. This event is still commemorated today in Norway by an annual cross-country ski event.

The first recorded use of skis in the United States was in Wisconsin in 1841 and the first downhill race ski champion was crowned in the California Sierras in 1867. They raced straight downhill on 12' skis at speeds up to 90 miles per hour. In the 1930s the first rope tow went in at Woodstock, Vermont, and the Winter Olympics were held at Lake Placid, New York. Ski areas with lifts at Alta, Utah, Sun Valley, Idaho, and Stowe, Vermont, were started in the 1930s. After World War II skiers from the Tenth Mountain Division came home from Europe and were instrumental in starting ski areas such as Aspen, Colorado, in the 1940s.

During the winter of 1949-50 skiers from The Ski Club of Washington, D.C., drove through West Virginia looking for snow and the next year started work on a rope tow in Canaan Valley. This ski area, called Cabin Mountain, Driftland, or Little Tuckerman's fits into the very early stages of United States skiing history. Two other private ski areas, both called Weiss Knob, were also started in Canaan Valley in the 1950s. These early areas

inspired a total of 13 West Virginia areas: first, Bald Knob at Beckley in 1958, then, Oglebay Park in Wheeling and Chestnut Ridge near Morgantown in the 1960s, next, Canaan Valley Resort in Canaan Valley, Alpine Lake in Terra Alta, and Snowshoe near Marlinton in the '70s, and, finally, Silver Creek near Marlinton, Winterplace near Beckley, Timberline Resort in Canaan Valley, and Tory Mountain near Harman in the '80s. Tory Mountain was partially built, but did not open and all of the above except Snowshoe, Silver Creek, Canaan, Timberline, and Winterplace have ceased to operate. The early Canaan Valley ski areas also stimulated the West Virginia Department of Commerce to commission a feasibility study of skiing in West Virginia in 1965. Checci and Company pinpointed four locations as the best in West Virginia for commercial ski areas. These areas were: Cabin Mountain in Canaan Valley, Job Knob near Harman, Elk Mountain in Randolph County, and Spruce Mountain in Pocohontas County. This study did not result in the building of any ski areas at these locations.

Going back to 1949-50, there was an almost snowless winter in the east, so Ski club of Washington, D.C. members, Hal Leich and Gorman Young, headed to West Virginia to look for snow. Some accounts say that airline pilots spotted snow in West Virginia when all else was bare and told Hal Leich. Art Kurle, a ski club member and early Canaan skier, says that Leich and Young used topographical maps and common sense to look for snow. One report says that Leich was driving through West Virginia in the 1940s and spotted the drift in Canaan, then went back in 1951. In any case, Young and Leich found the snow and knocked on Irene and Hobe Mauzy's door in February of 1951 and asked to ski the drift behind their house. The Mauzys heartily agreed and a decade long relationship was

well on its way. After skiing they went to Davis for a stay with Belmont and Katherine Cleaver at the Worden Hotel. The Cleavers also ran a general store, which later added West Virginia's first ski rental shop, using World War II surplus skis. The Cleavers' grandsons Ed and Tim Worden are still a part of Canaan Valley ski business at Timberline Resort. Ed is a ski school supervisor and Tim is the race director.

The next day Leich and Young went back to the drift to ski and local residents told them that the snow often stayed until July and that they hauled snow to the Platform, a dance hall across the road, to cool beer. After hearing these tales the SCWDC decided to put in a ski area. They signed a lease from the Mauzy's and bought a used rope tow in Oakland, Maryland. This tow was powered by an old truck motor and chassis. Fifty to sixty SCWDC members spent eight hundred man-hours digging holes for the lift, clearing rocks and stumps and building a warming hut. Jim Meyer, Mayor of Davis, and Mrs. Mauzy's brother, Oscar, and other locals helped by providing roofing, tools, and a horse and wagon to haul materials. The project cost about \$800 (most of the money in the treasury) and lift tickets were priced at one dollar for members and slightly more for non-members.

By the 1953-54 ski season, racing was in full swing at Cabin Mountain and lift lines were long enough to start plans for a second tow, which was completed for the 1954-55 season. The ski area's lease was renegotiated at \$100 per year plus 15% of the net revenue. The first annual Winter Carnival was held in February, 1955, the first such event south of the Mason-Dixon Line. By this time, Cabin Mountain had organized, regularly scheduled ski lessons (also a first) and a ski patrol. The carnival attracted droves of skiers and cars were parked on the road as far as the eye could see. Events included in the week-

end were: slalom races, costumes, the snowball dance held in the Davis High School Gym, the crowing of the carnival queen and the blessing of the skis at St. Veronica's Catholic Church. Also of note was Bob Barton, a SCWDC member, skiing the obstacle course. The second winter carnival in 1956 saw Davis bulging at the seams with people as the Saturday morning parade began. Estimates of the crowd were from 2000-4000 people, with traffic backed up for a mile in both directions. West Virginia governor William Marland walked up the slopes with the West Virginia Highlanders (complete with bag pipes and kilts) for the queen's coronation. Ice-skating on Mallow Pond and a torchlight parade were part of the week-end events. Ski business continued to flourish the next season and Governor Underwood signed a document proclaiming January 28 to February 3, 1957, as West Virginia Ski Week. The ski area, by 1958, had a rental shop and a new tow and slope. It was a great snow year with the drift reaching 15' in depth. In 1959, the entire Blackwater Falls Lodge was reserved for off-slope Winter Carnival activities.

During the 1960 ski season non-members outnumbered SCWDC members and their Budget and Finance Committee had to ask these questions: do we go on as we are, expand, contract, or close out? The Club decided to run the area through the 1961-62 season, but it was difficult to find volunteers to keep up the area's maintenance. Many new ski areas had also opened, complete with elaborate base lodges and chair lifts. Skiers did not want to ride rope tows, sleep in station wagons, and use outdoor privies anymore. Cabin Mountain's skier base had been seriously eroded. The area did not open for the 1962-63 ski season. It was the end of an era. Today the pasture and drift is mostly overgrown but

is still skied often every year by dedicated locals who hike to it. Ski Club of Washington D.C. members hiked and skied the drift in 1985 and 86 as part of their fiftieth anniversary celebration.

Weiss Knob Ski Area was started by Bob Barton, a Princeton graduate from a prominent Richmond, Virginia, family. He had been groomed to be a lawyer but pursued skiing instead. He installed a 1200' rope tow on a drift along the meadows of the present day Canaan Valley Ski Area and was in business for the 1955 ski season before, in his words, "I knew what was happening". The South's first commercial area was off and running but the access road was so bad that he sometimes hauled skiers in on a horse-drawn cart. By 1958 he had two rope tows and a shuttle t-bar on the meadows. Bob contacted Sepp Kober, a champion skier, who had coached two Olympic ski teams and offered him a job as ski school director at Weiss Knob. Sepp decided to take the job as director for the 1958-59 season and brought with him the New Austrian Technique.

Anita Louise Love also showed up in Canaan one twenty below zero night in 1959. Whether she came to see Sepp (whom she knew in Stowe, Vermont,) or just to try the skiing is not known. Anita, a Baltimore debutante and Wall Street broker, stayed in Tucker County and married Bob Barton. The three of them put much energy into the Weiss Knob Ski Area; however, the northwest face of the meadows caused the area to be scoured by brutal winds, which swept most of the slope bare. The slope was also too steep for many skiers. They decided to look for an alternate site and moved the ski area to back of Bald Knob where they put in three rope tows and a snow making system (one of the country's first). Bob said the lights in Davis dimmed when he turned on the compressors.

According to Bob the system ran for two days, was buried under a giant snowstorm, and not found until spring after more than four hundred inches of snow. They delivered groceries that winter to some stranded families with their small snow cat. Sepp, being much too qualified for Weiss Knob, moved to Hot Springs, Virginia, to develop the Homestead Ski Area. He remained there until his retirement a few years ago, returning to visit Canaan periodically. Othmar Maier then came to the new Weiss Knob to be Ski School Director, but also eventually left for the Homestead and then opened a ski shop in Washington, D.C. The ski school was taken over by Anita Barton and called the Louise Love Ski School. She was responsible for starting the Alpine Festival, The Governor's Cup Ski Races (which are still being held forty years later) and was instrumental in the early years of the Tucker County Information Center.

In 1963 the SCWDC held their Winter Carnival at Weiss Knob. This included the world's first para-ski competition. Parachutists landed on the slopes, strapped on skis and went through a giant slalom course. Competitors were timed from when they left the plane until they crossed the ski finish line. This competition continued through the Alpine Festival, 1965.

Bob and Anita could not financially afford to keep the Weiss Knob Ski Area running. There are many conflicting reports about its failure. Bob blamed the state of West Virginia for spooking away Weiss Knob investors because of its land condemnations and proposed ski area. Bob's well-known problem with alcohol and the development of modern ski areas have also been attributed to its demise. Bob and Anita moved to Pennsylvania and New York, always working in the ski industry. They moved back to Canaan Valley to open

the Valley's first independent ski shop. That shop was bought by the Ski Barn and is still in operation today.

The three ski areas that had been in operation proved that skiing was viable in Canaan Valley. The Cumberland Times, Baltimore Sun, and Washington Post published many articles about skiing in Canaan, as had Ski Magazine and National Geographic.

By 1965 the state of West Virginia, with funds from the Economic Development Administration, was going ahead with plans to build Canaan Valley Resort Ski Area and State Park. Some think that John Kennedy pushed to make these funds available to repay West Virginia for helping him attain the presidency. A modern ski facility, as well as a summer operation including golf, swimming, and tennis would help assure a more profitable operation than the past ski concerns.

The summer 2001 edition of the New England Ski Museum Newsletter contained an article by New Hampshire ski area consultant Sel Hannah. He recounted the early surveying of the Canaan Valley Ski Area circa 1964 for the state of West Virginia. He arrived at the entrance to Mary Warner's property to find a sheriff's car and a couple of government agency cars. Sel says that Mary shot out of the sheriff's hands the papers he was trying to serve. A council of war was at hand and he went back to New Hampshire. His next trip went better and Mary said she would let him stake out the area if he helped her dig potatoes and stayed away from the still. Although Mary had told Sel to survey, she was still bitter about being forced off her land and she shot into the trees above his head while he was working to see if he would leave. Bob Barton recounted that Mountain Maw (Mary), using her ancient side-loading Craig rifle, shot at a helicopter surveying her

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(missing purposely). Sel Hannah did finish his survey, taking note of a wind problem, and the ski area was built.

In 1970 Murray Dearborn, who was operating Tyrol, a ski area in New Hampshire, saw and invitation to bid for a ski area concession from the state of West Virginia. At first, he considered it a joke, 'skiing in West Virginia!' he thought. However, snowmaking was becoming a necessity, not a novelty, and Tyrol had no water, nor access to any; so he stopped by Canaan Valley during a road trip. He was impressed with the facility and followed up on the invitation to bid. He won the concession and the area opened for the 1971-72 season. The grand opening was held on February 11-13 with ski demonstrations by Ruedi Wyrsh, Gary Kiediasch and West Virginia's skiing bear. Gary Kiediasch went on to become general manager of Stowe, Vermont. Dearborn had a tough first two winters because of lack of natural snow, however, his persistence and his philosophy of making Canaan Valley Resort an integral part of the Tucker County Community, led to success for Murray and the ski area. Canaan Valley Resort Ski Area has greatly increased its skiable acreage, snow-making and, of course, the number of skiers.

Many ski business firsts occurred at Canaan Valley over the years. In 1972, John Lutz, a West Virginia native came to Canaan by way of Stowe, Vermont. He with the help of Ted Fries, also a West Virginia native, started one of the country's first blind ski programs at Canaan Valley Resort. Hundreds of blind persons have learned to ski with this program, which is still operating at Timberline. He also started an amputee ski program, a deaf ski program, and held one of the country's first Winter Special Olympics in 1979. His ski school was the first in the country to allow instructors on nordic equipment to teach alpine

lessons. The ski patrol was also one of the first to allow patrollers on telemark equipment. Canaan Valley also pioneered ski classes for college credit with four West Virginia colleges offering ski phys-ed credit. Several world-class skiers have skied at Canaan, including World Cup downhiller Holly Flanders. Skiers from the area have gone on to become race directors at Aspen Highlands and Copper Mountain, CO, and to hold supervisory positions in many other large ski areas. Canaan Valley has produced excellent powder skiers. In the 1970s, skiers started climbing the mountains around Canaan and skiing powder through open woods and down right-of-ways, including Bald Knob. Some have gone on to become helicopter ski guides. The last thirty years have produced an average snowfall of 167 inches at the 3400' elevation of the north face.

Canaan Valley Resort has had many innovative employees over the years. Andrew Dearborn became the nation's youngest mountain manager when he took over that position in the mid 1970s at age 18. One of Canaan's early ski school directors, David Faunce, became the first ski instructor from West Virginia to become fully certified by the Professional Ski Instructors of America. He was also instrumental in starting Canaan's then famous Spring Thing, a ski carnival. Steve Drumheller came to Canaan Valley Resort in the 1980s and started many of the South's most innovative advertising and marketing programs as well as Valley-wide employee training programs. Blair Taylor, Canaan Valley's general manager in the 1980s, led the resort to unprecedented skier numbers. His imaginative leadership style saw Canaan double its skier attendance to over one hundred thousand skiers, a number which has not been reached since; however, total Valley skier numbers are currently at record levels.

In 1982, Murray Dearborn sold his share of the concession to partner Brooks Rohrbaugh. Today the concessionaire is Guest Services, Inc., headquartered in Fairfax, Virginia. These three concessionaires combined with the unwavering support of the state of West Virginia have led Canaan Valley State Park to become one of the South's premiere ski destinations.

In 1972 Allegheny Properties bought a large tract of land in the Valley for the Timberline home sub-division. Allegheny Property's developer, David Downs, and an employee, Fred Soltow, former Canaan Valley Ski School Assistant Director, kept looking at the skiable terrain on Mountainside. One winter day they went to the top and Fred became the first person to ski Timberline. David decided to build a ski area on the mountain. It was his vision and energy that is largely responsible for the Timberline Ski Area that we have today. By 1981, Fred was development manager and Kurt Miller, a Parson's native, was mountain manager of the new Timberline Ski Area. It opened to the public for the 1982-83 season with 1200' T-bar, a 350' vertical drop, snowmaking and several trails. The ski area also had a 1000' vertical drop on trails reached by climbing and snowcat. This was the only snowcat-serviced skiing ever offered in West Virginia. Plans to replace the snowcat skiing with a 1000' vertical Doppelmayr lift fell through with a failed loan attempt in 1984 and Timberline was bought by Dr. Frederick Reichle, a Philadelphia surgeon, his sister Rose Marie Herz, and her son, Fred Herz. The ski area did operate for a year and opened for 1985-86 season with a 1000' vertical triple chair to the top. Herz, Herz, and Reichle, have since added a beginner chair and a 1000' vertical enclosed double chair (the old Silver Queen lift from Crested Butte, Colorado).

Timberline also has a large snowmaking system and is blessed with the most consistently steep terrain in the South.

As the second owners of Timberline, Herz, Herz, and Reichle, have made their unique contributions to Canaan skiing. They developed a ski area real estate sales program with the Valley's only ski-in, ski-out housing. They have also built ski dorms reminiscent of the old ski days in New England, which has made the sport affordable for many groups such as churches and scout troops. Timberline is well known for its support of ski racing. As well as a large Nastar program, it has held many collegiate, USSA, and high school races. The first two high school race teams in West Virginia, including Tucker County, called Timberline their home mountain. Last, but not least, the Women's Pro Ski Tour, with most of the world's best professional female skiers, was held at Timberline for the better part of the 1990s. Many other world-class skiers such as the Mahre brothers, Dan Eagan, and Glenn Plake have tried Timberline's slopes.

At one time Timberline had tremendous expansion potential but recent land sales have seriously curtailed this opportunity. However, it still has the best skiing terrain of any operating mountain south of New England.

The 1980s saw cross-country skiing become popular in Canaan Valley, with four centers operating. The most extensive of these operations was White Grass Ski Touring Center, started by Chip Chase, Winslow Ayer and Tom Preston. Chip and Winslow were operating a cross-country center in the Shenandoah Valley, bringing tours to the West Virginia mountains. They were spending so much time in Canaan Valley that they decided to move the operation. While skiing at Canaan Valley Resort they got together with

patroller Tom Preston and started skiing the back-country around Bald Knob. While skiing the north side, they came upon an old ski trail with a structure at the bottom. They found a long dormant ski area base building, complete with ancient skis. The old Weiss Knob II ski area had been rediscovered. The three of them had a quick business meeting and then found the present owner of the property. They came to an agreement and White Grass, as of 1981, had been officially relocated to Canaan. It is now the South's most extensive cross-country operation with lessons, rentals, sales, repairs, gourmet restaurant, back-country touring, telemarking, groomed tracks, snow farming and Bob Barton's old pot-bellied stove. Winslow Ayer moved back to Killington, Vermont, and Chip Chase now oversees the operation. Under Chip's committed and energetic direction, White Grass has seen its skier numbers increase ten-fold over the years.

Also in the 1980s, cross-country operations were started by Transmontaine on Canaan Heights and at Canaan Valley and Blackwater Falls State Parks. These operations, high natural snow fall, and varied terrain, make Canaan Valley the best ski touring location in the South.

Canaan Valley has had a long and rich ski history and at this time offers the best skiing in the East south of New England. The skiing at Canaan Valley and Timberline Resorts combined with the abundant snowfall and beauty of the area make Canaan Valley and excellent ski vacation experience. This area has also consistently attracted people who love the sport and believe in the quality of the Valley's skiing. They have put much of their life into the area's skiing and community. These factors along with the industry and ingenuity of the local people have enabled skiing to be a viable business in Tucker County.

Skiing has improved the area's overall prosperity and quality of life. Many people who might have had to move away have been able to remain and find employment in Tucker County. The large number of skier visits (almost 200,000 in 2001-2002) have helped create other businesses and have increased West Virginia's tourist industry.

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