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Alpine Skiing is Introduced in the 1936 Olympic Games

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ALPINE SKIING IS INTRODUCED AT THE 1936 OLYMPICS: SUN VALLEY BECOMES THE OLYMPIC TRAINING CENTER¹



U.S. Men's Olympic team, 1936 at Garmisch. Left to right: Lincoln Washburn, Al Lindley, Alec Bright, Tony Page, Darroch Crookes, Dick Durrance & Bob Livermore. Picture from Durrance, *The Man on the Medal*.



THE AMERICAN GIRLS' SQUAD
SWANN, BIRD, E. A. SMITH, CARTER, FURRER, SCHNEIDER, TSCHOL,
BOUGHTON-LEIGH, HEATH, WOOLSEY, MC KEAN

1936 Women's Olympic team, *American Ski Annual 1937*.

¹ By John W. Lundin, copyright 2024. John W. Lundin is a lawyer, historian and author, founding member of the Washington State Ski and Snowboard Museum, and splits his time between Seattle and Sun Valley. He is the author of numerous magazine articles and four award winning books: *Early Skiing on Snoqualmie Pass* (2017); *Sun Valley, Ketchum and the Wood River Valley* (2020); *Skiing Sun Valley: a History from Union Pacific to the Holdings* (2020), (recipient of three national book awards); and *Ski Jumping in Washington State: a Nordic Tradition* (2021). John helped organize two exhibits on ski jumping: "Sublime Sights: Ski Jumping in Nordic America" at Seattle's National Nordic Museum in 2021; and "Skiers in Flight: Sun Valley's Ski Jumping Roots" at the Regional History Museum in Ketchum, Idaho, in 2022. He won the 2023 Western Heritage Prize from the Far West Ski Association for his multi-year work to "Work to Preserve Ski Jumping History, Expressing Norwegian Identity, and its Role in the Development of Skiing in America."

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I. HISTORY OF SKIING IN THE WINTER OLYMPICS

Ski Jumping Was the Country's Most Popular Form of the Sport for Decades

From the late 1800s onward, ski jumping was the most popular form of the sport in the United States, due to the influence of Norwegian immigrants who learned to jump in the old country.²

Ski jumping originated in Norway, where it was a part of normal skiing. "Getting from one farm to another in Norway in winter often involves a climb on skis up one side of a hill, and ski jumping developed as a means of clearing obstacles when skiing down the other side," according to Anson in *Jumping Through Time*. Ski jumping in the United States was started by Norwegian immigrants in the mid-west in the 1880s and 1890s. By 1930, 1,100,098 people living in the United States were either born in Norway or had Norwegian parents, and 47% of them lived in New York, Chicago, Minneapolis or Seattle. The Norwegians, "once settled, some craved to get the feel of skis on their feet,"

Ski jumping was introduced in North America by immigrants from Northern Europe. Between 1870 and 1910, more than 1,500,000 Scandinavians moved to the United States; a third were Norwegians. Many emigrated from Norway to find employment in the New World. A large number settled in the Northern Midwest, the Far West and the Northeast...The Norwegians brought to their new country a passion for skiing...They organized ski competitions to strengthen their ethnic ties, showcase their abilities, and generate a new sense of belonging to their new country...

It has been said that wherever two or three Norwegians gathered together, they constructed a jump and held competitions. This was never so true than in the Pacific Northwest, as a wave of new clubs showed up along the coastal mountain ranges.³

² Lundin, John W., *Ski Jumping in Washington State: a Nordic Tradition*.

³ Anson, Harold "Cork," *Jumping Through Time: A History of Ski Jumping In the United States and Southwestern Canada*.

Ski jumping began in the mid-west (Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin), becoming the “thrill sport of winter.” “Through the influence of Scandinavians, ski clubs sprouted up all over the northern United States.” By the end of the 1890s, Michigan had over 30 ski clubs, each with a jump to hold club and inter-club competitions.

From the 1920s to the early 1940s, ski jumping tournaments in Washington dominated the local sports news and were reported nationally. These included mid-summer tournaments at Paradise on Mt. Rainier from 1917-1934 (the second place after Finse, Norway where such events could take place); Cle Elum from 1924-1934; after 1929, at Beaver Lake on Snoqualmie Pass, Leavenworth and Oregon’s Mt. Hood; and the Milwaukee Ski Bowl at Hyak east of Snoqualmie Pass after 1940. These tournaments attracted the world’s best ski jumpers and many thousands of hardy spectators, who hiked long distances to reach the jumping sites, and stood outside all day to watch the crazy Norwegians soar through the air, often in snowstorms.

Map showing the “circuit” of ski jumping tournaments from Leavenworth, to Cle Elum, Mt. Hood and Snoqualmie Pass. *Seattle Times*, February 7, 1932.

Washington's ski areas hosted a number of National Jumping Championships and Olympic Selection tournaments that brought in the world's best competitors, and a number of national distance records were set here.

NATIONAL SKI JUMPING CHAMPIONSHIPS: (NINE)

Seattle Ski Club at the Milwaukee Ski Bowl (3): 1940 jumping events for National Four-Way Championships; National Championships 1941, & 1948

Leavenworth Winter Ski Club (LWSC) (6) - 1955, 1959, 1967, 1974, 1976, 1978.

U.S. OLYMPIC TEAM TRYOUTS (SIX)

1931 (sectional), Snoqualmie Pass, Seattle Ski Club; 1935, (sectional), Leavenworth; 1947, final, Milwaukee Ski Bowl, Seattle Ski Club; 1959, final, Leavenworth; 1963, (sectional), Leavenworth; 1972, final, Leavenworth.

NATIONAL SKI JUMPING DISTANCE RECORDS SET (SEVEN)

1939, Sigurd Ulland, Leavenworth (LWSC)

1941, Torger Tokle, Leavenworth (LWSC) & Milwaukee Ski Bowl (Seattle Ski Club)

1947, Arnhold Kongsgaard, Milwaukee Ski Bowl (Seattle Ski Club) – unofficial

1949, Sverre Kongsgaard, Milwaukee Ski Bowl (Seattle Ski Club)

1965, Toralf Engan, Leavenworth (LWSC)

1967, Bjorn Wirkola, Leavenworth (LWSC)

1970, Greg Swor, Leavenworth (LWSC)⁴

Between 1924 and 1932, skiing in the Winter Olympic Games were limited to Nordic competitions (jumping and cross-country racing). Norwegians dominated ski jumping for

⁴ Lundin, John W., *Ski Jumping in Washington State: a Nordic Tradition*.

decades, winning every Olympic gold medal from 1924 to 1952. Interest in Alpine skiing generally did not appear nationally until the late 1930s, influenced by the first appearance of Alpine skiing in the 1936 Olympics, and the opening of Sun Valley in December 1936, that introduced Alpine skiing to the country.

Alpine skiing started to become popular in the late 1930s, eventually surpassing ski jumping. In the 1930s and 1940s, many of the best skiers were Four-Way athletes, who competed in downhill, slalom, cross-country and jumping, and college ski teams typically competed in all four disciplines. The transition to Alpine skiing was led by successful ski jumpers such as Portland's Hjalmar Hvam, Sun Valley's Alf Engen, and Norway's Sigmund and Birger Ruud and Reidar Andersen, who were outstanding Nordic and Alpine competitors. According to ski historian Ingrid P. Wicken, ski jumping was the king of winter sports in California in the 1930s, and "was a key force in the awakening of winter sports possibilities throughout the state..." In 1936, U.S. Olympic Nordic team member Roy Mikkelsen said,

[w]hen slalom and downhill competitions came into being, the enthusiasts predicted that these would overshadow ski jumping and possibly obliterate it. The last few seasons of ski competition have brought out that ski jumpers...make by far the best downhill runners.

Ironically, ski jumpers believed that their sport was safer than downhill racing.

Norwegian Reidar Andersen was a three-time winner of the King's Cup at the Holmenkollen and winner of the bronze medal in the 1936 Olympics, who became a Nordic-combined skier. In an interview in the *Seattle Times* of April 6, 1939, Andersen said:

This downhill racing business is getting crazy...Look at Mount Hood. Look at Sun Valley. High speed courses, both of them. You might break your neck. I'll tell you the right competitions - jumping and slalom racing. Slalom gives you balance. Jumping gives you the true thrill of skiing.

Winter Olympics Begin in 1924 With Nordic Skiing Events

According to *A Brief History of Winter Olympics*, ice-skating competition first appeared at the 1908 Summer Olympic Games in London. In 1916, a “Skiing Olympia” was to take place as part of the Olympic Games in the Black Forest of Germany, a whole week of winter sports to include figure and speed skating, ice hockey and Nordic skiing. However, the Games were cancelled because of World War I.⁵

In the 1920 Olympic Games in Antwerp, Belgium, winter sports made their appearance, including figure skating and ice hockey. The 1924 Olympics in France, included an International Winter Sports Week at Chamoinx, featuring figure skating, speed skating, ice hockey, Nordic skiing and bobsledding. Over 258 athletes from 16 countries competed in 16 events. Nordic countries “steamrolled the competition” and won the most medals. The United States won two medals - a gold in the speed skating competition, and a bronze in the Special Ski Jump by Anders Haugen, although his medal was not recognized until 1974, after the judge’s sheets for the event were reevaluated and it was learned he finished third not fourth.⁶

⁵ http://www.historyoftheolympics.net/history_of_winter_olympics.html.

⁶ Anders Haugen was captain of the 1924 U.S. Olympic team, where he had the longest jump in the Special Jumping event, but a miscalculation of points by the judges had him finishing in 4th place. When the error was discovered in 1974, the Norwegian government brought Anders and his family to Norway, where the daughter of Thorlief Haug, the man who received the bronze medal, awarded Haugen the medal he should have received 50 years earlier. However, the International Olympic Committee does not recognize the error, and its official records still show that the bronze medal was won by Thorlief Haug. <https://skihall.com/hall-of-famers/anders-haugen/>. Anders set a world distance record of 152 feet in 1911, winning the National Jumping Championship; and set National Distance records in 1919 (213 feet) and 1920 (214 feet). Anders’ brother, Lars Haugen, was one of the most successful ski jumpers in the U.S., winning nearly every title in the country. He won the Norge Ski Club tournaments in 1912, 1915, 1918, 1924 and 1928; set the National Distance Record of 214 feet in 1919 at Steamboat Springs; and was National Class A champion in 1912, 1915, 1918, 1924, 1927 and 1928. He was never on an Olympic team as he turned professional around the time the winter Olympics began, but his brother Anders was eligible for Olympic competition as he remained an amateur. <https://skihall.com/hall-of-famers/lars-haugen>.



Anders Haugen.



Lars Haugen, celebrated ski expert, "doing his stuff" on the Mount Rainier slide in preparation for national meet Sunday. Lars, by the way, holds the U. S. professional ski record.

Anders' brother Lars practicing for the 1922 Ski Jumping Tournament at Paradise on Mt. Rainier. *Seattle P.I.*, July 1, 1922.

In 1925, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) decided to establish formal Winter Olympic Games, separate from the Summer Olympics, and selected St. Moritz, Switzerland, as the host of the 1928 Winter Games. Sonja Henie of Norway made history by winning a gold medal in the figure skating competition at age 15. The 1932 Winter Games were held at Lake Placid, New York, where Sonja Henie defended her Olympic title. She won her 3rd gold in 1936.

The 1924, 1928 and 1932 Winter Games featured Nordic skiing events only - cross-country, Nordic combined, and jumping - and only men could compete. The 1936 Winter Games were awarded to Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, and were the first to have Alpine skiing along with Nordic events.

II. OLYMPIC TEAM TRYOUTS ARE HELD ON MT. RAINIER IN 1935

In winter 1935, the National Downhill and Slalom Championships and Olympic Team Tryouts were held in Paradise Valley on Washington's Mt. Rainier. This was the country's first true National Alpine championship, it was publicized throughout the country, and put Northwest skiing on the map. Washington was chosen to host this major event because Alpine skiing was an important new sport there in the early 1930s, and skiing there was seen to be some of the best in the country.⁷

Alpine Skiing Appears Early in the Northwest

In the early and mid-1930s, interest in Alpine skiing grew in Washington, private ski lodges were built, and ski clubs formed on Snoqualmie Pass, Paradise Valley on Mt. Rainier, Mt. Baker, Spokane and elsewhere. Skiing was initially often centered around private clubs and their ski hills, which were narrow runs cut through trees. The new sport of slalom racing appeared in the early 1930s, quickly became popular, and ski clubs began having regular competitions against each other.

The *Seattle Times* of January 17, 1932 said "the whole world seems suddenly to have gone skiing." A few years before, skiers at Snoqualmie Pass had the hills to themselves, but then along came Ben Thompson "and skiing began to rise in importance." Ben and his mates at the Seattle Ski Club built facilities and gathered jumpers, and "crowds began to grow where no crowds ever were before, that is, before the advent of skiing." Now, those crowds "plunge into the mountains Sunday after Sunday in quest of snow." A few years before, it was hard to find ski equipment to buy, but in 1932, one Seattle store sold 2,000 pairs of skis in one month, and

⁷ Lundin, John W., *Early Skiing on Snoqualmie Pass*.

another store stocked thousands of dollars of skis, straps, mountain clothing, etc.

The *Seattle Times* of January 18, 1933 said *Thousands Hit Snow Trails* and described the large number of skiers who traveled to local mountains every weekend.

Spread along Snoqualmie Pass from North Bend to Cle Elum were automobiles Sunday and Saturday - and from those machines, etched in the snow, criss-crossed and twisted, were thousands of parallel grooves, mute testimony to a Washington yen for skiing. "You never saw anything like it"...Crowds have been anywhere from 2,000 to 4,000 every week-end since the first snow fell - and they grow larger every Sunday. And that was only one sector of the skiing front.

Six or seven years ago, skiing was limited to

those from the old country who had skiing as a heritage, but the idea caught on. Once propped on a pair of skis, the enthusiast couldn't let go. He couldn't even keep quiet about it. He insisted on others trying it. The turnout the prior Sunday at Snoqualmie Pass, Paradise Valley, Stampede Pass on the Northern Pacific Line and Mount Baker "was tremendous."

Slalom, the ski race that follows a winding course between gates (pairs of poles topped with flags), was devised by British sportsman Arnold Lunn (later Sir Arnold Lunn) in the 1920s. (Although in 1905 Austrian Matthias Zdarsky had developed a "testing run," an 85-gate slalom, this had little effect and no influence on modern slalom racing). Slalom is one of the Alpine events, so called because they originated in the Alps of Europe. It is governed by the Fédération Internationale de Ski (FIS), which held the first world championship in slalom in 1931. The sport was added in the 1936 Games held at Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany.

Slalom racing was "introduced to the public" in Washington in April 1933, at the Seattle Junior Chamber of Commerce spring sports carnival at Paradise Valley on Mount Rainier. It had been brought to the Northwest by Ben Thompson, "manager of Paradise Lodge and one of the Northwest's foremost cross-country and mountain skiers," according to the *Seattle Times* of

April 1, 1933. The race course is 1,000 feet long, but racers travel 2,000 feet before they finish and “there are frequent and tremendous spills.”

It is a pell-mell, downhill of muscle over mind. But not in a straight manner. It has twists and turns, flags to round, moments in which to gather speed for a nerve-shaking stop, and finally, a triumphant flash across the finish line. There is nothing sane about it. The racers gallop against time...They round the flags, leap frantically, striving to maintain balance through the maze of flags the rules require must be rounded.

SLALOM--THE NEW SPORT



Hans Grage, Seattle ski expert, performs an acute turn in winning a recent Paradise Valley event. He will compete in another of the new and brilliant races tomorrow during the Seattle Junior Chamber of Commerce spring snow sports carnival in Paradise Valley.

Seattle Times, April 1, 1933 (page 7)

In fall 1933, the Seattle Ski Club broke new ground by including slalom events in the Pacific Northwestern Ski Association winter racing schedule. Until then, the PNSA's sanctioned tournaments had included only nordic events - jumping and cross-country. Slalom skiing, “which calls for the highest sort of skill,” had been introduced by Ben Thompson who was in

charge of winter sports at Rainier National Park, and it “caught on by wildfire.” The new sport of slalom, was

a sport for swift skills and certain nerves. You start at the top of a 2,000 foot slide. There are flags placed at intervals along the 2,000 feet and you steer dexterously in and out of this path of flags. Fine, if you know how to do it! The skiers in their bright colored clothes, winding in and out of the flags, darting like flamingo winged birds to the bottom of the slide, reminded one somewhat of the highly colored balls in a pushball game being released from their grooves. It’s decidedly a sport for the young and adventurous, is this slalom.

There was much excitement over the upcoming ski season, which was expected to be bigger than ever.

It’s the time of year now when the skiing season is upon us, when thoughts turn to the dips and the thrills and the challenge of this swiftest of outdoor sports. It’s the time when all roads - even those you plow through on snowshoes - lead to Paradise, Mount Rainier National Park, for that is to the West what the Bavarian Alps, the Austrian Tyrol is to Europeans, and it’s the Lake Placid region of the west. St. Moritz is not a far cry from us yodelers and skiers! Sharing honors with Rainier is the Summit, another playground for winter sports.⁸

For the winter of 1933, the Mount Rainier National Park Company opened 15 cabins, and 42 new cabins for skiers to stay during the winter at Paradise, so skiers from Tacoma and Seattle could spend weekends there. Dozens of Seattle couples had leased quarters for the season at the new 35 room Winter Lodge, along with 37 rooms in the old lodge. Ten couples or singles that had leased quarters for the 1934 ski season were named in the *Seattle Times* article. “There’s dancing in the lobby at night, there’s skiing on the side hills in the gleam of a big searchlight that plays on the snowbanks, giving the whole scene the effect of a tinsel Christmas postcard.”

During the ski season of 1933-1934, weekly slalom races were held at Paradise Valley on Mount Rainier, and the University Book Store awarded medals to the winners in the spring.

⁸ *Seattle Times*, September 20 & November 10, 1933.

Many of the best local skiers came out of those races on Mount Rainier, including Don Fraser, Don Amick, Darroch Crookes, Grace Carter, the Smith sisters, and Gretchen Kunigk, all of whom became members of U.S. Olympic ski teams. Soon, annual Alpine races were held at Snoqualmie Pass, Mount Baker, Mount Spokane, Mount Hood, and later at Stevens Pass.

By the early 1930s, equipment had improved and could be obtained from a number of outlets, making skiing more accessible. According to *The Mountaineers, A History*, in 1932, the University Book Store in Seattle sold a full array of ski equipment. “Boots were \$6, skis were \$3.50, ski jackets \$3.95, bindings \$3.50 to \$4.50, Norwegian bamboo poles \$2.25, and wax 35 cents.” “By 1933, skiers could purchase the latest downhill cable bindings, which allowed for both touring and downhill skiing. Metal edges were become popular in Europe, but most skiers in the Northwest considered them for experts only since they required delicate skill in edging.”

In 1934, Ray Anderson and Ben Thomson formed a partnership to make ski equipment in Seattle, producing A&T laminated skis, for which Anderson received a patent in May 1933, and were stronger than skis made from a single piece of wood. In 1934, A&T began producing the first steel ski pole, stronger than the bamboo then used, and also produced the first cable binding in the U.S., an improvement over leather heel straps. The company became one of the country’s largest manufacturers and distributors of ski equipment. Climbing boots were used for skiing initially, but by 1935, actual ski boots were available “with rugged soles, grooved and square toes.” Also in 1935, the first Kandahar cable binding was introduced that held the skier’s heel to the ski.⁹

⁹ In 1934, ads appearing in the *Seattle Times* show that A & T sold its laminated skis for \$12, which was much more expensive than other skis, bindings for \$5.75, poles for \$1.50 to \$2.00, Swiss boots for \$16.50 and ski parkas with a hood for \$8.50. Eddie Bauer sold skis ranging from \$1.75 for Mountain King skis, \$1.75 for Tubbs

In 1935, when Averell Harriman was considering having Union Pacific open a ski resort in the west to regenerate passenger revenue that had been lost during the Great Depression, he asked a fellow banker, John E.P. Morgan, to analyze the market for skiing. Morgan's report to Harriman of April 3, 1936, said the rapid growth of skiing and winter sports in the country was a plus. The ski industry was booming in several areas around the country, including Seattle, where there were around 15,000 pairs of skis and 20 ski clubs.

In October 1934, the Pacific Northwestern Ski Association authorized the Washington Ski Club to make a bid to hold the National Championship tournament and Olympic trials in 1935 at Paradise Valley on Mount Rainier, since the Northwest "possessed of admittedly the finest ski terrain in America." The move recognized the "tremendous growth in the popularity of slalom and downhill racing...Slalom and downhill racing are entitled to equal recognition with jumping and cross-country, and this organization cannot be caught napping." PNSA's bylaws and constitution were amended to recognize Alpine events, which would be added to the Pacific Northwest championships, and a four-way championship would start the following year with equal weight be given to each branch of competition.

In December 1934, the National Championship tournament was awarded to the Washington Ski Club by the American Olympic Games Committee. This was a major step forward for Alpine skiing in Washington. On January 28, 1935, the *Seattle Times* reported that the Washington Ski Club won a combined downhill and slalom tournament in Oregon, and Oregon skiers were "licking their wounds." There was more than just the tournament victory - "the sport is catching on and Washington skiers are leading the way." The Washington Ski Club

Ash skis, \$3.85 for Winner Hickory skis, \$4.45 for Strand Hickory skis, and Canadian ski shoes for \$5.45.

bid won out against one submitted by the White Mountain Ski Runners of Boston, the club that sponsored most of the country's major Alpine ski races until World War II.

1935 National Downhill and Slalom Tournament and Olympic Team Selection¹⁰

Alpine skiing in Washington got a major boost as the best skiers in the country competed on Mount Rainier at the National Downhill and Slalom Championships and Olympic Tryouts for men and women on April 13 & 14, 1935, hosted by the newly formed Washington Ski Club. The first National Alpine tournament occurred in 1933, at Mt. Moosilauke, N.H., an event that received no publicity in the Northwest. The Mt. Rainier tournament was one of the early significant Alpine races in the United States, made more so because it was the selection event for the 1936 Olympics. The *Seattle Times* of April 13, 1935, called the it “the biggest ski event America has known since the Olympic winter games of 1932.”



¹⁰ Lundin, John W., “National Downhill and Slalom Championships & Olympic Trials Are Held on Mt. Rainier April 1935.”

The downhill course at Mount Rainier “is the toughest downhill you ever heard of,” according to the *Seattle Times*. It was one and three quarters of a mile long, dropping 3,280 feet, making an average grade of 33.33 percent, “and that’s steep.” Racers’ times were expected to be around six minutes for the course. The Seattle and Tacoma Chambers of Commerce headed up money raising for the event.

The course was perfectly suited for the “high speed turn,” which was the latest development in skiing perfected by Dick Durrance, the East’s outstanding downhill and slalom skier who headed the Dartmouth ski team.

It is especially adapted for downhill and slalom racing, because with it there is less sidewise sliding or braking effect than in other turns, and less tiring to the legs. The “high speed turn” is not a new or separate technique, but is a further development of the technique which New England skiers have been learning the last six years. It may be spoken of as the next development after the mastery of the stem-christiana. It is recommended that the skier does not try to learn the high-speed turn before mastering the stem-christiana. A skier should first acquire control, then comes confidence, and with confidence comes speed. And it is for speed that this turn surpasses all others. One must learn the other turns including the various forms of christiana as a basis on which to develop the high-speed turn.

The country’s best skiers entered the tournament. There were 59 entrants: eight from the East; one from the Middle West; 13 from the Rocky Mountains; 12 from California; 14 from the Pacific Northwest; 10 from Canada; and one from Austria. Northwest racers included Hjalmar Hvam of the Cascade Ski Club of Portland; Washington Ski Club members Don Fraser, Carleton Wiegel, Ken Syverson, Hans Grage, and Darroch Crookes; John Woodward of the U.W. Ski Team; and Emil Cahen of the Seattle Ski Club, according to the *Seattle Times* of April 10, 1935.

The two and 3/16 mile long downhill course had 2,750 feet of vertical drop, starting at

Sugar Loaf at 8,500 feet above sea level, going to Panorama Point, then to Edith Creek basin on a 35% slope. The 1,500 foot slalom course had 20 turns on a course along Alta Vista.



The Downhill and Slalom course at Rainier National Park—scene of the Olympic Tryouts and National Championships.

Ski Magazine, January 1936

The *Seattle Times* had extensive coverage of the tournament on April 14, 15, 16 and 18, 1935. Bus rates from Seattle and Tacoma had been cut to an absolute minimum to encourage attendance. There were 2,000 parking spaces at Narada Falls, and shuttle buses ran between Longmire and Narada. Accommodations at Mount Rainier were sold out for the weekend. The round trip from Narada Falls to Paradise was a two and half mile hike over snow, averaging between 12 and 20 feet in depth, and it was another two mile hike from Paradise to the slalom course on the mountain. A total of 7,295 persons entered the park to see the ski races. For the first time, it was an Open Race that allowed ski instructors (who were considered professionals)

to compete against true amateurs.



Mt. Rainier 1935. Courtesy, Tacoma Public Library D2504-3.



Speakers set up for 1935 National Championship Tournament on Mt. Rainier. Courtesy of Tacoma Public Library.



Start of the Downhill Race at the Olympic Tryouts—Paradise Valley.

Photo by Orville Borgersen.

Ski Magazine, January 1936.

Hannes Schroll, an Austrian teaching at Badger Pass at Yosemite, dominated the competition, winning the slalom, downhill and combined events. beating favorite Dick Durrance of the Dartmouth Ski Team. Schroll was known as “the madman of the Alps” and the “tornado

on skis; a whooping, yodeling, hat-throwing, rip-snorting fool who doesn't respect fog ice, precipices, avalanches or tradition." The downhill course was shrouded in fog for over a mile, and was covered by an avalanche near the finish line before it was cleared. "Schroll didn't fall. He went leaping from snow terrace to snow terrace, and sometimes as far as 60 feet, landed on one ski, fought wildly for balance and recovered," reaching 75 MPH in the mist and fog, surprising the spectators as he came out of the fog yodeling and waving his hat.

"That Amazing Schroll...who stole the ski meet, is as great a piece of coordinated athletic machinery as this writer has ever seen in action," used a European skiing technique that "beats American methods all to pieces," according to the *Seattle Times*. "Hannes Schroll, the Austrian who stole the ski meet, is as great a piece of coordinated athletic machinery as this writer has ever seen in action." Schroll used longer poles and skis, with bindings set in the middle, compared to short poles and skis with bindings set back of the center of the skis used Durrance. Where Durrance "clipped close to flags in the slalom race with only a hip wiggle or a tempo turn to miss them, Scholl swung wide," and skied in a "vorlage" position, with legs fairly straight, arms flung back and up, and ski poles held high. He constantly shifted weight, "pumping rapidly - getting air under his skis, eliminating friction, picking up speed."

The event's three best U.S. skiers, who were "almost certain to be selected to the Olympic squad" included Dick Durrance of Dartmouth College, who was first of all U.S. competitors (and second in the combined); E.D. Hunter Jr. of Dartmouth College; and Robert Livermore, Jr. of Boston's Hochgebirge Ski Club.

Here is how Dick Durrance described the Mt. Rainier tournament in his autobiography,

Man on the Medal. Hannes Schroll, an Austrian ski instructor at Yosemite, won the downhill, “demoralizing the field of inexperienced amateurs,” along with the slalom and combined titles. Dick Durrance finished second in the downhill and third in the slalom (after falling), behind Schroll and Bob Livermore of Boston’s Hochgebirge Ski Club, resulting in first place honors in the Combined title that counted for the Olympic tryouts. Durrance was selected for the Olympic team along with Dartmouth teammates Link Washburn (third in the downhill, fifth in the slalom), Bob Livermore and Seattle’s Darroch Crookes. Other skiers were selected based on their prior records, including Seattle’s Don Fraser, who won the 1934 Silver Skis race on Mt. Rainier, but whose ski injury suffered training for the 1935 tournament prevented him from competing. Several were chosen for their European experiences the prior year: Hochgebirger ski club member Alex Bright, Al Lindley and Tony Page. Dartmouth’s Warren Chivers was chosen for the cross-country team.¹¹



Dick Durrance racing slalom, Mt. Rainier, 1935. Photo from *Dick Durrance, The Man on the Medal*.

¹¹ Durrance, *Man on the Medal*, page 24.



On the strength of their showing in Saturday and Sunday's National championships and U. S. Olympic trials in downhill and slalom racing these three eastern youngsters are almost certain choices for the U. S. Olympic ski team which will go to Germany in 1936. From left—Richard Durrance, Dartmouth College freshman, who placed first among U. S. competitors in the meet; E. D. (Ted) Hunter, Jr., of Dartmouth, third in combined, and Robert Livermore, Jr., of the Ski Club Hochgebirge, Boston, who placed second in combined competition behind Durrance.

Dick Durrance at Mt. Rainier, 1935.
Seattle Times, April 16, 1935.



Dick Durrance at Mt. Rainier, 1935.
Courtesy, Tacoma Public Library.



Hannes Schroll, Mt. Rainier 1935.
Courtesy, Tacoma Public Library.

Two sisters from Tacoma won National titles “skiing off with major awards in the initial running of the women’s national championships in downhill and slalom.” Ellis-Ayr Smith, who had only been skiing a couple of seasons, “made a thrilling run down the side of Panorama to

Edith Creek Basis in the remarkable time of 1:57.6 to best a field of 14 competitors,” winning the women’s National Downhill title, beating Seattle’s Grace Carter by 36 seconds, “falling only once. Most of her competitors were somersaulting 5 to 15 times in their do-or-die races against time.” Ethelynne “Skit” Smith won the women’s National Slalom title, beating Seattle’s Grace Carter by three seconds. Ellis-Ayr finished fourth in the slalom, and “the big thrill of the day” came when it was announced that she won the Combined National Championship title. Grace Carter finished second in the combined and Skit Smith sixth. The girls had to hike a couple of miles up a steep slope to reach the race courses. The *Seattle Times* published a picture of the Smith sisters on April 18, saying *Tacoma’s Great Ski Champions*, and the American Ski Annual called them the *Tacoma Ski Queens*. A teenage girl named Gretchen Kunigk from Tacoma who would later make her mark in ski racing was “watching in awe from the sidelines.”



Ellis-Ayre & Ethlynne Smith, Mr. Rainier, 1935.
Courtesy, Tacoma Public Library.

On October 3, 1935, the *Seattle Times* announced that Seattle and Tacoma would send five men and women to the Olympic Winter Games in Garmish-Partenkirchen, Germany: Seattle's Don Fraser and Darroch Crookes for the men's U.S. Olympic team; and Tacoma's Ellis-Ayr and Ethelynne Smith and Seattle's Grace Carter of Seattle for the women's Olympic team.

Don Fraser never competed in the National Championships or U.S. Olympic trials. Four days before they were held, boring at high speed down the series of snowbanked terraces high above Paradise, he leaped a bank...80, 90 feet. In fact, he overleaped it, landing on an uphill slope, in skiing, you can't do that. The speed is too severe. He ripped ligaments in his leg, and was carried out in a toboggan. But Eastern skiers, who had seen him pass them, said he ought to go. He was chosen for the team on reputation and past record.

Darroch Crookes of Seattle had no 1933-1934 competitive record. He was working. He went back into competition that winter, placed high in the Nationals. On the strength of his showing and the knowledge that he had fine powers, he was chosen.

Ellis-Ayr Smith won the national women's downhill race. Her sister Ethelynne - "Skit" to her intimates - won the national women's slalom race.



Upper left: "Skit" Smith; Center: Ellis-Ayr Smith; Right: Grace Carter; Lower Right: Darroch Crookes; Left: Don Fraser, Washington's entries in the skiing events of the Olympic Games at Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany.

Northwest skiers on 1936 U.S. Olympic team. *Ski* magazine, January 1936.

It is a remarkable tribute to the strength of Washington skiing that five members of the 1936 U.S. Olympic team came from the state.

The National Ski Year Book of 1936, published by the National Ski Association, described how influential the 1935 National Championships and Olympic Tryout tournament was locally, according to the *Seattle Times* of December 8, 1935.

The widespread general public interest in the National Downhill and Slalom Ski Championships was most surprising. In the East, only those “in the know” would have been talking freely and venturing opinions. In Seattle, however, the championships seemed as general a subject of public conversation as baseball games are in Boston.

Darroch Crookes sailed first in late November on the Lauritzen Line’s refrigerator ship Ulla, “beating the gun,” since the rest of the team was not sailing until January 2. Carlton Wiegel, who the Washington Ski Club unsuccessfully sought to have included on the Olympic team, along with John Woodward, sailed with Crookes since “he felt the trip was one he should take since he had the chance.” They would be en route for 35 days before reaching Hamburg, Germany, and reach Garmisch-Partenkirchen just after Christmas, so they would have a month and a half practice time before the Games. The other four Northwestern Olympians left on the Norwegian Cruise Lines Oregon Express, which would reach Europe before Crookes and Wiegel because it was a faster ship. The men would go into immediate training at Garmisch-Partenkirchen, while the girls would to Saint Anton, Austria, to join a team of 12 American girls who will be trained for a month before the Games begin.¹²

The U.S. Olympic Committee did not pay the expenses for the Washington skiers to go to the Olympics in 1936. Tacoma and Seattle sections of the Washington Olympic Ski Committee guaranteed the funds for the skiers’ costs. The Washington Ski Club, to which all five skiers

¹² *Local Olympic Skier to Sail Within Week*, *Seattle Times*, November 13, 1935 (page 18); *Crookes to Sail, Ulla Takes Skiers Away*, *Seattle Times*, November 21, 1935 (page 27); *Four Washington Skiers Will Sail Tonight*, *Seattle Times*, November 30, 1935 (page 5).

belonged, held a fund-raising dance in early November for the athletes. The club produced 7,000 buttons that were sold for \$.25 apiece to raise funds. In December, the Washington Ski Club was working to raise \$2,000 more to complete the budget for the trip. By early January, 1936, the skier's fund was \$600 short of the \$3,000 goal. Tacoma guaranteed expenses for its two national women's champions, the Smith sisters, and Seattle guaranteed the expenses for its three team candidates.¹³

Olympians were not treated very well in those days. In 1948, after Gretchen Kunigk Fraser won two Olympic medals in the 1948 Games, she said her husband Don only received \$75 plus free room and board for two weeks once he reached the Olympic site in Garmish-Partenkirchen, along with a \$50 overcoat, cap and sweater. He had to pay his own travel expenses, a far cry from the way our Olympic athletes are treated these days. Don worked his way to Europe on board a Norwegian freighter, chipping rust and painting the decks, taking 31 days, earning \$1 per day. He landed at Le Harve and took a train to Garmish. Dick Durrance, the top skier on the 1936 U.S. Olympic team, said the U.S. Olympic Committee paid his fare to Europe.

In Europe, the U.S. would select eight men and eight women racers, to compete for four men's and women's slots who would race in the Olympic games. All of the northwest skiers except for Skit Smith made the eight person Olympic teams, but none were selected to race in the games, although Grace Carter was the first substitute on the women's team. This shows how good skiing in Washington was in 1936, that four or five of 16 of the best racers in the United

¹³ *Drive for Ski Fund to Start Here Soon, Olympic Games Combat Seems Sure for Team*, Seattle Times, October 27, 1935 (page 22); *Ski Fund Heads Meet Tonight*, Seattle Times, January 7, 1936 (page 17).

States came from Seattle or Tacoma.

Don Fraser hurt his hip before the Olympics, which took him out of the competition to be one of the four men who would race in the Alpine events, although he then became part of the skiers considered for the Nordic cross-country events. Darroch Crookes took 5th in the downhill trials, just missing the cut to race in the games.



U.S. Olympic team 1936, Don Fraser, Dick Durrance, Darroch Crookes. Picture from Durrance, *The Man on the Medal*.



U.S. Olympic team, 1936 at Zermatt. Bob Livermore, Al Lindley, Darroch Crookes, Dick Durrance, & Lincoln Washburn. Picture from Durrance, *The Man on the Medal*.

Grace Carter was the first substitute on the women's team, but did not race. The *Seattle Times* reported on February 3, 1936, that "Ellis-Ayr Smith of Tacoma, national downhill champion, and her sister Skit, national slalom champion, failed to land on the squad." The *Times* published a picture on February 7, of the eight women from whom the four woman Olympic team was picked, which included Ellis-Ayr Smith and Grace Carter.



THE AMERICAN GIRLS' SQUAD
SWANN, BIRD, E. A. SMITH, CARTER, FURRER, SCHNEIDER, TSCHOL,
BOUGHTON-LEIGH, HEATH, WOOLSEY, MC KEAN

Grace Carter and Ellis-Ayre Smith are shown in this picture of the 1936 Women's Olympic team, from the *American Ski Annual 1937*.

IN OLYMPICS, U. S. GALS OUTCLASSED



America's four-woman Olympic ski team, picked from this right by the handsome lad at the right, Otto Furrer, Swiss ski coach, didn't do so well today at Garmisch-Partenkirchen. But they tried. Here, first, are the introductions. From left, Mary Bird, Marian McKean, Ellis-Ayre Smith of Tacoma, Lillian Swann, Elizabeth Woolsey, Grace Carter of Seattle, Clarita Heath of California, and Team Captain Helen Boughton-Leigh. Miss Woolsey had the best time of any today, finishing in a tie for fourteenth. Helen Boughton-Leigh was 24th; Clarita Heath was 26th, and Mary Bird was 32nd. The others didn't make the Olympic team.—(A. F. Photo.)

U.S. women's Olympic team picture with Ellis-Ayre Smith and Grace Carter. *Seattle Times*, February 7, 1936 (page 12)

III. 1936: WINTER OLYMPICS ARE HELD IN GERMANY: THE NAZI OLYMPICS¹⁴

The 1936 Winter Olympics featured Alpine skiing for the first time, with men's and women's medals awarded for the combined event (downhill and slalom), along with Nordic events (cross-country, Nordic combined, and jumping). Men and women competed in the Alpine events, although only men were allowed in the Nordic events.

The Garmisch Olympics was the first well-publicized showcase for alpine skiing, which became the high glamor event of the Winter Games. Only three alpine medals were awarded for men and three for women, for a single event, the combined slalom-downhill score. Ski instructors could not compete as they were considered "professionals," keeping top skiers from Austria and Switzerland out of the Games. Ironically, top skiers from France and Germany who were supported by government grants were considered amateurs, even though they were paid to race, while ski instructors from other countries who were not paid to race, were professionals. As a result, Switzerland and Austria boycotted the Garmisch Games.¹⁵

In the premier edition of *Ski Magazine* published in January 1936, Seattle skier Hans Otto Giese wrote an article, *The Olympic Games*, about the upcoming international competition at Garmisch-Parkenkirchen in Germany. Giese had been the chairman of the reception committee for the 1935 U.S. Olympic Team tryouts and National Championships held on Mount Rainier. He said the Olympics would "serve to form lasting friendships to be of the greatest service and value

¹⁴ See, Lundin, John, *Washington Skiers in the 1936 and 1948 Winter Olympics*, HistoryLink.org Essay 10786; Alpenglow Ski Mountaineering History Project, [alpenglow.org](http://www.skimuseum.net/pdf/1936-52.pdf); 1936 Winter Olympics, <http://www.skimuseum.net/pdf/1936-52.pdf>;

¹⁵ Although the 1936 Winter Olympics was the first Olympic Game to feature Alpine skiing, the sport had already been a part of five F.I.S. Alpine World Championships and eight Arlberg-Kandahar races by 1936. "Garmisch 1936 - Hitler's Olympics," *Skiing Heritage*, December 2001.

to athletics as one of the major factors in modern international relations to the end of maintaining peace amongst humanity and for continuing and furthering more than ever the fine ancient ideals and the spirit of the Olympic Games.”

Giese, who was born in Germany and immigrated to the U.S. in 1923, was a mainstay of Northwest skiing. He painted a rosy picture of the ideals of Olympic Games, but the story of the 1936 Olympics were blackened by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party, organizers of the events (Germany hosted both the winter and summer Olympic Games in 1936). During WWII, Giese was accused of being a Nazi supporter when the federal government sought to revoke his U.S. citizenship obtained in 1930, asserting he “did not renounce fully allegiance to Reich when he took American oath,” and accusing him of “allegiance and fidelity to Germany,” although the case was dismissed by the court.¹⁶

Adolf Hitler saw the 1936 Olympics as a way to celebrate the Nazi Party’s control over Germany, and invested large amounts of money into the event. Germany wanted to showcase its athletes as stars of the Aryan race, superior for their genetic makeup rather than their athleticism.

¹⁶ At Giese’s trial, the government sought to introduce materials seized from his house showing his connections to Germany, Hitler and the German Counsel-General in Seattle. In 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court decided *Baumgartner v. United States*, 64 S. Ct. 1204, holding that to deprive one of citizenship, the evidence must not only be clear, cogent and convincing but must also be unequivocal as of the time he took the oath. The Seattle court held that when Giese took his oath of U.S. citizenship in 1930, he had no allegiance to the Nazi cause or Hitler, who did not take control of Germany until 1933. If he secretly retained German allegiance in 1930, it must have been to the Hindenburg regime then in power. Even if he became indoctrinated by Nazi doctrine after 1933, that was not sufficient to cancel his naturalization which preceded the indoctrination by three years. The action against Giese was dismissed. In February 1945, the Seattle High School Ski Council voted unanimously to retain Giese as its advisor, reaffirming the confidence that the local skiing community had in him.

“U.S. Moves to Cancel Hans Giese’s Citizenship,” *Seattle Times*, January 15, 1943 (page 1); “Giese Trial Underway, Giese Admits Nazi Consul Sought His Services in Seattle,” *Seattle Times*, August 31, 1943 (page 1); “Trial of Giese is Completed,” *Seattle Times*, September 13, 1943 (page 4); “Army Lifts Exclusion Ban Against Giese,” *Seattle Times*, February 23, 1944 (page 1); “Skiers Retain Giese,” *Seattle Times*, February 2, 1945 (page 17); “U.S. to Drop Case Against Hans O. Giese,” *Seattle Times*, March 2, 1945 (page 2); *United States v. Giese*, 56 F. Supp. 1018 (1944).

The Olympics “provided Hitler with a showcase...It was a propaganda bonanza for him.” The 1936 Olympics were referred to as the “Nazi Olympics” as a result. Even the poster for the Winter Games has a skier who could be seen as giving a Nazi salute.



Courtesy, Tacoma Public Library.

Adolf Hitler instituted an “Aryans-only” policy throughout German athletic organizations, sparking global outrage, and leading to a movement to boycott the 1936 Games. Avery Brundage, president of the American Olympic Committee (AOC), said Jewish athletes were being treated fairly and that the Games should go on, as planned, which they did. Many commentators believe that Brundage was complicit in the Nazi’s anti-Semitism in the Olympics, as he even attempted to paint American Jews as unpatriotic and misguided for supporting a boycott. Brundage was in the 1912 Olympics in the decathlon as a teammate of the famous Native American athlete Jim Thorpe, although he dropped out of competition. Brundage became

friends with two German athletes who were high officials in the German Olympic movement in 1936.¹⁷

After the Nazi seizure of power in Germany in 1933, the United States and other western democracies began to question the morality of supporting the Olympic Games hosted by the regime. In an article called "The Movement to Boycott the Berlin Olympics of 1936," its authors described how Brundage undermined the boycott movement.

Avery Brundage opposed a boycott, arguing that politics had no place in sport. He fought to send a US team to the 1936 Olympics, claiming: "The Olympic Games belong to the athletes and not to the politicians." He wrote in the AOC's pamphlet "Fair Play for American Athletes" that American athletes should not become involved in the present "Jew-Nazi altercation."

As the Olympics controversy heated up in 1935, Brundage alleged the existence of a "Jewish-Communist conspiracy" to keep the United States out of the Games. Both the US ambassador to Germany, William E. Dodd, and George Messersmith, head of the US Legation in Vienna, deplored the American Olympic Committee's decision to go to Berlin.

Many American newspaper editors and anti-Nazi groups, led by Jeremiah Mahoney, president of the Amateur Athletic Union, were unwilling to accept Nazi Germany's hollow pledges regarding German Jewish athletes. But a determined Avery Brundage maneuvered the Amateur Athletic Union to a close vote in favor of sending an American team to Berlin, and, in the end, Mahoney's boycott effort failed.

Once the Amateur Athletic Union of the United States voted for participation in December 1935, however, other countries fell in line.¹⁸

The Nazi imprint remained stamped all over both the 1936 Winter and Summer Olympics, and the Nazi flag was flown all over the Olympic sites.

¹⁷ "What Happened When Hitler Hosted the Olympics 80 Years Ago," <https://time.com/4432857/hitler-hosted-olympics-1936/>;

¹⁸ "The Movement to Boycott the Berlin Olympics of 1936," <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-movement-to-boycott-the-berlin-olympics-of-1936>

IV. TRAINING IN EUROPE

Personal accounts of the U.S. Olympic team at the 1936 Games in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, can be found in two books: Elizabeth Woolsey, *Off the Beaten Track*, (Wilson Bench Press, 1984); and Dick Durrance, *Dick Durrance, the Man on the Medal: the Life and Times of America's First Great Ski Racer*, told to John Jerome, (1995). Other accounts can be found in the *American Ski Annual 1936* published by the National Ski Association: "Our Season of European Competition: Downhill and Slalom," by Edgar H. Hunter, Jr; and "American Skiers at the Olympics - The Women," by Alice Damrosch Wolfe.

Dick Durrance decided to take the year of 1935-36 off from Dartmouth, and went to Europe to train for the Olympics, staying in Garmisch where had previously lived with his family, and the site of the upcoming Olympic Games, so "I could get in shape and study the downhill course before the team arrived in January." The U.S. Olympic committee paid his fare and he took an earlier boat than the other team members. He was joined by Ed Hunter, Darroch Crookes and Linc Washburn to train in Garmisch before the rest of the ski team arrived. The late arrivers had to work out their "boat-stiffened legs" for a few days before training could begin.¹⁹

California college professor Joel Hildebrand was team manager, although he did no coaching, according to Durrance. Durrance and Alex Bright were co-captains, and Dick showed the team where to go and train since he had been there before. "Everyone knew how to ski. All

¹⁹ Durrance was from Florida, but at age 11, his family moved to Garmisch, Germany where he learned to ski, joined the Garmish Ski Club and soon become an accomplished racer. , participating in the club's races. Dick became the National Junior Champion at the German National Championships in 1932. He competed in many of Europe's classic races at Wengen, Switzerland; Kitzbuhel, Austria; Garmisch, Germany; and in the Arlberg-Kandahar at Murren ,Switzerland, racing against well known European racers.

we were doing was trying to get into shape and ski fast and win. So we skied around Garmisch, all the places where I'd learned to ski." Dick finally recommended that the team get Tony Seelos to give them a lesson, as he was a "fantastic skier" and being a ski instructor he was considered to be a professional, ineligible for the Olympics.

The team went to Kitzbuhel, Austria, for a pre-Olympic tune up race where Seelos gave them one day of coaching, which involved following him down the hill, picking up a few pointers by mimicking him. That was the only coaching the men's team received. Hildebrand said the session was invaluable and recommended that future U.S. teams should have regular services of "some coach as Seelos." The race at Kitzbuhel was a difficult, icy one where both Durrance and Hunter were hurt. Durrance tried to jump over a ditch, fell but got up and finished 10th in the race. Ed Hunter hit some rocks on the course, cut his leg to the bone and "eliminated himself from running" in the Olympics. Don Fraser took himself out of the running to race as he was recovering from a broken leg, although he attempted to qualify in cross-country. Durrance competed in a pair of non-Olympic ski jumping events, finishing 17th, a week before the competition, where he forward, and sprained his ankle badly (although he recovered well enough to compete in the Games).²⁰

The 1936 women's Olympic team had several advantages over the men's team that had a manager who did not know much about ski racing, and had no coaching experience. The women benefitted greatly from having Alice Damrosch Wolfe as their manager, chaperone and godmother, who had played the same role for the 1935 U.S. F.I.S. team that competed in Europe. They also benefitted from time spent at St. Anton training under the legendary Hannes Schneider,

²⁰ Durrance, *The Man on the Medal*, pages 26-37.

and later having Swiss ski legend Otto Furrer as their trainer.²¹ They trained in Europe for 38 days, starting in December, longer than virtually any of the men (except Dick Durrance), although “thirty-eight days is not long enough to prepare for the race of your life, according to Wolfe. The state-supported German women had been training for two years on a “cost-is-no-object basis.” Germany’s Christl Cranz and Norway’s 16-year old Laila Schou-Nilsen were the favorites



ALICE DAMROSCH WOLFE



Alice Damrosch Kaier Wolfe

Elizabeth (Betty) Woolsey had been on the 1935 U.S. F.I.S. team that competed in Europe, at the invitation of Alice Wolfe, (Mrs. Dudley Wolfe), the manager and organizer of the

²¹ Alice Damrosch Wolfe Kaier served the National Ski Association’s teams in a number of capacities for over thirty years, according to her biography from the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame into which she was inducted in 1969. “Kiaer was the initial promoter of international skiing competition for women of the United States. As a dedicated worker, she was responsible for assembling the first United States Ski Team, a group which competed in the F.I.S. Championships of 1935, and the U.S. Olympic Team of 1936.” She was the chaperone for the 1948 U.S. women’s Olympic Team, worked with the 1952 Olympic Ski Games Committee and had a close association with the 1954 World Games.

training squad, an enthusiastic mountaineer and skier who spent much of the year in the Austrian Alps. Wolfe took the 1935 women's team to St. Anton, Austria, to train. "Alice's girls" consisted of Betty; Lili Swan; Mary Bird from Boston; Kathryn Ward living in Florence who had already spent a few winters in St. Anton; Faith Donaldson from Massachusetts; their captain, Helen Broughton-Leigh, married to a Britisher who raced for England in the 1933 F.I.S. World Championships, placing second in the slalom; and Lilo Schwartzenbach of Zurich, born in New York and a good skier.



Photo: Unknown / Wikimedia Common (cropped)

Betty Woolsey

The 1935 team had taken private ski lessons at St. Anton, from Hannes Schneider, the king, founder of the Arlberg School, and "a man of great integrity." They become thoroughly "grounded in the Arlberg system which was based on the snowplow and the stem turn which led to stem christies and finally to parallel turns," The 1936 team trained at St. Anton, Davos,

Switzerland, and Wengen, Switzerland, before competing in their first F.I.S. race on the Schildthorn course at Murren, the stronghold of the British, headquarters of the Kandahar Ski Club and winter home of Arnold Lunn who invented slalom skiing.

Betty called the 1936 Games “the Nazi Olympics.” She was team captain and its best downhill racer. The 1936 women’s Olympic team consisted of the “veterans of ‘35” (those who raced on the 1935 F.I.S. team), and those who qualified through elimination races held by ski clubs in the U.S. There was little money available for the Olympic team. Some traveled to Europe on a Norwegian fruit boat via the Panama Canal, arriving with sore feet having run miles on its hard deck to keep in shape. The newcomers included Clarita Heath from California, small and blond, often mistaken for a Scandinavian; Seattle’s Grace Carter, a blond dynamo, full of competitive spirit and “one of the most determined people I have ever met;” Boston’s Marian McKean, who skied with a natural elegance; and Dot Brewer of Boston.

Woolsey described the instructions the team received from team manager Alice Wolfe after arriving in Europe.

Eight hours of sleep, a limit of seven cigarettes a day and not more than two glasses of wine or beer. A week later we were asked how we were getting along. Mary Bird said she loved to sleep, was enjoying the wine, but was having trouble with the cigarettes as she had never smoked.

Alice Damrosch Wolfe said the women from the east showed up in St. Anton in early December to start training, and those from the west showed up later and had to catch up. The team consisted of three categories of women: those from the 1935 F.I.S. team - Helen Broughton-Leigh, captain, Mary Bird, Lilian Swann, Lilo Schwarzenbech, Kathryn Ward and Elizabeth Woolsey. Women chosen from the 1935 championships at Mt. Rainier - Grace Carter, Ellis Ayr

Smith and Ethelynne Smith. Newcomers - Dorothy Brewer, Clarita Heath, Hannah Locke and Marian McKean. The girls trained for racing and raced continuously from the end of December until the middle of March (Arberg-Kandahar).

The women's team benefitted greatly from securing Otto Furrer as its trainer, with Thomas Babney from Boston as assistant manager. Wolfe raised the money to employ Furrer, as not other funds were available. Furrer's "skiing experience made his advice invaluable in picking the team and planning the training. He helped with the training, timing the slaloms, arranging transportation and housing." With Furrer's help, by January 12, an eight person team was chosen to compete at Garmisch: Mary Bird, Helen Broughton-Leigh, Grace Carter, Clarita Heath, Ellis Ayr Smith, Lillian Swan and Betty Woolsey.²²

The women's team trained at St. Anton, practicing slalom and downhill, and touring the mountains around town one day a week. At Davos, the team got in 4,000 downhill meters a day in training runs. They moved to Garmish-Partenkirchen, the Olympic site, a week and a half before the competition began, where the atmosphere was great, although the U.S. team felt lost among "the hundreds of jumpers, bobsledders, skiers, officials and the press who swarmed the streets. There were many Alpine skiers as twenty four countries...sent competitors," according to

²² Otto Furrer (19 October 1903 – 26 July 1951) was a Swiss alpine skier and cross-country skier and world champion born in Zermatt. At the second winter Olympics in St. Moritz in 1928, he competed on the Swiss team in the military patrol demonstration sport where the team placed third. Furrer also participated in a cross-country skiing event. In the 1931, 1932 and 1934 Arlberg-Kandahar races, he won the Men's downhill and alpine combined, and also won slalom in 1932 (tie) and 1934, with second place slalom runs in 1930 and 1931. At the 1931 FIS Alpine World Ski Championships, Furrer was second in downhill. Furrer won the combined world championship in 1932 (second in slalom and third in downhill), and in 1933 was third in the combined. He was co-founder of the ski resort at Zermatt where he operated a ski school from 1935 until his death in an accident on the Matterhorn. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto_Furrer.

Woolsey.

At Garmisch the women's team lived in a pension with the state-subsidized German team. Wolfe said the U.S. girls were intimidated by the German skiers, who were "superwomen." Woolsey said the team had no prejudice against Hitler at the time, since he seemed to be "just another dictator, along with Mussolini and Stalin." The Americans fell many times in practice, joking about their luck about their luck in not racing for a country "might be punished by a trip to Dachau, the nearest concentration camp." Note - this is an odd comment, since the existence of the German concentration camps was not known internationally until many years later. The U.S. women teamed up with the American men's ski and ice hockey teams. After the Games, Seattle's Grace Lindley married Olympic skier Al Lindley, and Helen Broughton-Leigh married Olympic ice skater Malcolm McAlpin, so "all our time wasn't spent on the ski slopes."

Arnold Lunn, in a letter to the editor of the *American Ski Annual*, 1936, said "your American teams are a very welcome element in these international ski meetings." The American downhill racers were "immensely popular and left the best impressions wherever they went." He heard complaints from British racers, saying the "damned Norskies...have snaked all the nicest girls," meaning the American team who "were busily engaged in establishing an American-Norwegian entente."

On January 29, 1936, the *Seattle Times* published a report from a Seattle skier at Barmish-Partenkirchen, who said Dick Durrance "is so superior to the rest of the Americans that it isn't even funny." The women were training at Davos, Switzerland, and Grace Carter asked for letters from home. Don Fraser hit tree and hurt his hip in practice, and it wasn't responding to

treatment very fast before the Olympics, but he still hoped to race in the downhill squad and on the 40-kilometer relay team (cross-country). The hip injury ended up taking Fraser out of the competition to be one of the four men who would race in Alpine events. However, Fraser, who had been a successful cross-country racer in the Northwest, attempted to become one of the four U.S. cross-country entrants for the 18-Kilometer races. He was selected as an alternate but did not race, and later was known as having made the U.S. Olympic team for both Alpine and Nordic events. Darroch Crookes took 5th in the downhill trials, just missing the cut to race in the games.²³

Wolfe said the “enormous crowds, the publicity, reporters, different nations competing, the terrific excitement, were a bit unnerving to our very inexperienced young team.” According to Woolsey, the political atmosphere was tense during the opening ceremony, held in a snowstorm, where the teams marched past Herr Hitler and other officials. There was a perceptible reaction when the U.S. team did not give them the Olympic salute which they felt resembled the Nazi salute, but turned “eyes right” as they went by the reviewing stand.

Members of the 1936 U.S. Olympic ski team were impressed by the tram built in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany for the Games, allowing them to get in far more training runs than ever before. This inspired the skiers from Washington to lobby to have ski lifts installed in their home ski areas, especially at Mount Rainier, when they returned.²⁴

²³ Seattle Men Out, Grace Carter Lands as Sub on Girl’s Team,” *Seattle Times*, February 3, 1936 (page 14)

²⁴ Lundin, John W., “Aerial Tram on Mount Rainier: Twenty Years of Debate,” Essay 20554 , <http://historylink.org/File/20554>

V. THE 1936 WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES

The Olympic Games began on February 7, 1936, with the downhill race, which along with the slalom, was part of the single event, the Combined Championship, for which medals were given for the top three skiers.

Eight men and eight women racers competed for four men's and women's slots to race in the Olympic games. All of the northwest skiers except for Skit Smith made the eight person Olympic teams, but none were selected to race in the games.

The U.S. men who raced in the Olympic Alpine ski events include Dick Durrance, Robert Livermore, Jr. of Boston, George H. Page and A. Lincoln Washborn of New York. The U.S. women who raced were Clarita Heath of California, Helen Boughton-Leigh of Boston, Elizabeth Woolsey of New Haven, and Mary Elizabeth Bird of Boston. Grace Carter was an alternate. "The men represented the very first generation of American alpine competitors, mostly arising from inter-collegiate and interclub competition. Alpine competitions themselves had been sparse...The U.S. men faced formidable opposition" from European skiers who had competed at the highest level in the Alps for years.²⁵

The downhill course was not in good shape. It was ice covered by new snow, was risky, and the snow at the bottom of the course was warm, requiring the racers to pole across a third of a mile flat at the end. Norway's Birger Ruud won the downhill race, using the correct wax. He had telephoned from the top of the race course to get the temperature down below so knew what wax to use. He had lived in Garmish the prior year, operating a ski shop, becoming familiar with its race courses and ski jump. Germans took second and third places in the downhill.

²⁵ "Garmisch 1936 - Hitler's Olympics," *Skiing Heritage*, December 2001.

Durrance was the highest U.S. finisher but he had the wrong wax, had to pole the entire last part of the course, finished 11th, and was “terribly disappointed.” Americans Tony Page took 17th in the downhill, Bob Livermore took 28th, and Link Washburn took 34th.²⁶

Germans took gold in the men’s and women’s events. The U.S. team placed eight overall, winning four medals.²⁷

Dick Durrance has a chapter about the 1936 Olympics in his biography, *Dick Durrance, The Man on the Medal*.

The downhill was held on the first day of competition. Durrance and his U.S. teammates had spent a lot of time studying the course and learning and practicing the shortcuts. However, that hard work did not pay off .

It was pretty simple in those days. There’s a picture of me standing in the start, no starting shack, no electronic equipment, just two flags and a guy standing there with a watch. I started well and skied the whole course exactly as I’d planned, cut every corner, took ever hill as straight as you cold. Then I got down near the bottom where there was this really flat stretch that went along for about a third of a mile, and all of a sudden I died. I hardly moved. I had to pole and pole and pole. I poled my heart out. Finally I got to the last hill, which was pretty flat also, and I knew I’d blown it. In those days you did your own waxing - that was a big part of racing, how well you waxed as well as how you skied - and I didn’t have the wax. I got eleventh. All my preparation and work, knowing how to take every hill and corner, had gone to waste. I knew that none of the other people had done much preparation. It was awful. I was terribly, terribly disappointed.

Norwegian Birger Ruud won the downhill - a ski jumper who’d never skied a downhill in his life, but a fantastic ski jumper. He had the right wax.

²⁶ “Garmisch 1936 - Hitler’s Olympics,” *Skiing Heritage*, December 2001; “Durrance Places 10th in Combined Downhill, Slalom,” *Seattle Times*, February 10, 1936 (page 14); Jerome, *Dick Durrance, The Man on the Medal*, pages 24 - 33.

²⁷ 1936 Winter Olympics, <http://www.skimuseum.net/pdf/1936-52.pdf>; “Leavenworth’s Big Ski Meet on Next Sunday, No Team Selected, U.S. Ski Team Selected,” *Seattle Times*, February 2, 1936 (page 19); “Seattle Men Out, Grace Carter Lands as Sub on Girl’s Team,” *Seattle Times*, February 3, 1936 (page 14).



Dick Durrance at the start of the Olympic Downhill race, 1936. Photo from *Dick Durrance, The Man on the Medal*.



Dick Durrance in the Olympic slalom race. Photo from *Dick Durrance, The Man on the Medal*.

Durrance did a little better in the slalom, and ended up finishing tenth in the combined, the highest American skier, in spite of incurring a six-second penalty for straddling a gate (which he denied he had done). Americans George Page and Bob Livermore finished 14th and 18th. Germans Franz Pfnr and Lantschner placed first and second in the slalom, and France's Emile Allais was third. In the combined competition (the only event where medals were awarded), German skiers won gold (Franz Pfnur) and silver (Bustav Lantschner), and Emile Allais of France won bronze.

The women's downhill was an icy narrow course through the woods on the Kruezzegg, that had been improved by German labor battalions who packed it. Betty Woolsey was in the top third of the racers, finishing 14th, the top U.S. racer, although she was "affected by the whole Olympic set up," according to Wolfe. Clarita Heath, Helen Broughton-Leigh and Mary Bird

“were in the last bracket.” The downhill was won by 16-year old Norwegian Laila Shou-Nilsen, “what a girl!,” followed by two Germans, Christl Crantz and Kaethe Grasegger. These girls “are today in that little class of real super-skiers.” Germans won four out of the top six places in the downhill . Betty Woolsey proved herself to be a “great skier...who can be counted on to be amongst the first in any downhill skiing event in the world,” according to Wolfe.

The German world champion, Christl Cranz, won the slalom. Betty caught her tip on a gate, spraining her ankle, but finished the race. Her combined times in the downhill and slalom made her the top U.S. racer.

Christl Crantz and Kaethe Grasegger won gold and silver in the Combined, and Laila Schou-Nilsen won the bronze. Betty Woolsey said they were all “impressed by the efficiency and discipline of the Germans who maintained the courses and the modesty of Cristl Cranz,” the world’s top woman skier.



16-year old Norwegian Laila Shou-Nilsen, silver medal winner in the women’s Combined.

The Olympic jumping competition was held on February 16, 1936, on an 80 meter jump at the Olympiaschanze in front of 100,000 spectators. Norwegian jumpers Birger Ruud won the gold medal and Reidar Andersen, the bronze. Sven Eriksson of Sweden won the silver medal. Sverre Fredheim of St. Paul, Minn. was the highest U.S. jumper finishing 11th; Caspar Oimoen of Minot, North Dakota finished 13th; Roy Mikkelsen of Auburn California, 23rd; and Walter Bietila of Ishpeming, Michigan, 30th. Caspar Oimoen had finished fifth in the jumping event at the 1932 Olympics.²⁸

The famous Norwegian skier Birger Ruud attempted an unprecedented double Olympic win, by entering the Alpine events as well as the jumping, since was a talented all around skier. He won the downhill portion of the Combined competition by 4.4 seconds, but missed a gate in the slalom and placed fourth, just out of the medal contention for the Combined. Birger won the gold medal in ski jumping in 1932, and again in 1936. He was part of the famous Ruud family of ski jumpers that included Sigmund (1928 Olympic silver medalist) and Asbjorn.

Praise for Washington Skiers

After the Olympics, Darroch Crookes was identified as the male skier who had significant potential for the future. Professor Hildebrand, the U.S. team manager, said if Crookes had come to Europe sooner and had practiced more, “he would have given the rest of the boys a run for their money.” Crookes “has more skiing ahead of him than any of the other men.”²⁹

Grace Carter received considerable praise. “Miss Carter’s rise in international skiing has

²⁸ Ruud Captures First; U.S. Team Far Behind,” *SeattleTimes*, February 7, 1936 (page 12); *Ski Jumping at the 1936 Winter Olympics*, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ski_Jumping_at_the_1936_Winter_Olympics

²⁹ “Garmisch Letter, Crookes Proving Brilliant Skier,” *Seattle Times*, February 15, 1936 (page 4).

astonished even her coach, Otto Furrer, and the team manager, Mrs. Dudley Wolfe...With proper coaching, [she] could easily become one of the world's great skiers."³⁰ Her rise international skiing "has astounded even her coach, Otto Furrer." Coach Furrer said she showed "great improvement and promise." Alfred Lindley, a member of the U.S. ski team, was asked whether Carter should be kept in Europe another month, since he was "an impartial but competent observer." He cabled, "also news Grace staying. Furrer reports great improvement and promise. Running second now." In other words, Grace was no longer number five on the U.S. women's ski team but she was number two. Lindley and Carter later married, so his view may have less than "impartial."

³⁰ "Grace Carter Stays in Europe, Fraser, Crookes Likely as Kandahar Race Entries, Money Raised her for Brilliant Young Girl," *Seattle Times*, February 20, 1936 (page 12).

VI. U.S. TEAM MEMBERS STAY IN EUROPE TO TRAIN AND COMPETE IN OTHER TOURNAMENTS

A number of the U.S. ski team members stayed in Europe after the 1936 Olympics, and entered other competitions to improve their skiing. The ski jumpers and cross-country competitors went to Norway to participate in the famous Holmenkollen event in Oslo, where the King and Queen watched the competition.

The a number of the Alpine skiers went to Austria, Switzerland and Italy to enter some of Europe's classic races, learning the challenges of traveling on European trains with a full set of racing gear.³¹ The Alpine skiers included Dick Durrance, Linc Washburn, Al Lindley, Squab Read and Ed Hunter. It also included the five Northwest skiers - Don Fraser, Darroch Crookes, Grace Carter, and the Smith sisters - along with Helen Broughton-Leigh, Clarita Heath, Hannah Locke, Marian McKean and Betty Woolsey. According to Durrance, the Americans brought jars of peanut butter with them for a snack. Germans did not understand peanut butter, and found the sight of it offensive. The Americans would take their jars into the washroom to eat it with their fingers, "and then, hunger pangs assuaged, stroll nonchalantly back to their seats."

Seattle friends of Grace Carter, "the most brilliant youngster to flash into the American skiing picture since the sport took hold, provided her with sufficient money to keep her in Europe until the Kandahar race was over." She planned to acquire "ski-learning under her coach Otto Furrer...one of the world's most famous ski instructors, and coach of the American women's team," and compete in the Arlberg Kandahar, "the greatest of all European downhill mountain

³¹ Alex Bright, Bob Livermore and Tony Page returned to the U.S.

races.”³²

Don Fraser wrote the *Seattle Times*, saying that although the Northwest skiers were familiar with the newer style of skiing, they were going to Seefeld after the Games to take instruction from Anton Seelos, even though the trip would take “quite a few of our precious dollars.” Ellis-Ayr and Skit Smith were going to St. Anton am Arlberg to study skiing under teachers there. “They are both skiing beautifully, and with a little more coaching will be able to hold their own in most company.” Fraser said it seems that they let the Northwest down, but if they had been in Europe for two more weeks, “a different team would have been named.”³³

The United States entered full teams of six men and six women in the International Ski Federation (F.I.S.) races at Innsbruck, Austria, in the middle of February 1936, including Grace Carter, Donald Fraser and Darroch Crooks. The course required a four hour walk up to the start. “Conditions at Innsbruck were atrocious - murderous, suicidal,” according to the *New York Times*, and “it was a far tougher proposition than anyone had bargained for...with what casualties,” according to Ed Hunter. Washburn and Fraser did not race because of illness. “Sigmund Ruud, running wide open, caught an edge near the finish and cartwheeled a hundred feet through rocks and stumps, but was fortunately not seriously injured.” Fraser and Washburn did not start because of illness. Dick Durrance and Elizabeth Woolsey “paced the American delegation.” In the downhill, Durrance finished 14th (making a graceful rapid descent over the worst icy stretch to “great applause”) and Woolsey eighth. Lindley was 28th and Crookes

³² “Grace Carter Stays in Europe, Fraser, Crookes Likely as Kandahar Race Entries, Money Raised her for Brilliant Young Girl,” *Seattle Times*, February 20, 1936 (page 12).

³³ “Europe Ski Notes,” *Seattle Times*, March 10, 1936 (page 4).

finished 29th in spite of hitting a tree, breaking two ribs.. With his slalom finish, Durrance placed 11th in the combined. Grace Carter finished 20th in the downhill. Crookes cracked two rib in a high-speed fall on the ice-coated course, hitting a tree, where “spills galore and broken bones” marred the race, and only 39 of 62 racers finished.³⁴

On March 10, 1936, the *Seattle Times* reported that Darroch Crookes and Grace Carter competed in the Marmalad downhill in the Italian Alps (at Italy’s expense), and the two of them would enter the Kandahar race at St. Anton, Austria, along with Don Fraser, and Ellis-Ayr and Skit Smith. The northwestern skiers were expected to return home after the Kandahar, and arrive in time for the Muir Race, “if they don’t decide to stay a bit longer in Europe.”³⁵

Durrance and several other Americans then raced in the King’s Cup at Sestriere, Italy, a four day event with a different downhill course every day. He surprised the Europeans by winning the first day’s downhill on the Banchetta, a long downhill course. There was no course preparation, and skiers coped with whatever snow conditions were there, according to Dick.

This was through a wooded area without a trail, just thin woods...I decided to take everything straight, and I did, and I won it. They guys couldn’t believe it, all the top Austrians, the racers who had been at the Olympics and so on. Something was wrong. This guy’s coming on. All of a sudden, the eyes were on me.

They would race in the morning and study the next day’s course in the afternoon. “No gates, of course: you walked up, looking it over, and then skied it.” One course was a huge schuss, four times as long as the headwall at Tuckerman’s Ravine, and about as steep. “You just sort of

³⁴ “Seattle Skiers “In, Carter Crookes, Fraser at F.I.S.,” *Seattle Times*, February 19, 1936 (page 16); “Crookes hurt, Carter is 20th, Durrance 13th, F.I.S. Race Hard,” *Seattle Times*, February 21, 1936 (page 11); “Our Season of European Competition: Downhill and Slalom,” by Edgar H. Hunter, Jr.

³⁵ “Europe Ski Notes,” *Seattle Times*, March 10, 1936 (page 4).

closed your eyes all the way down, scared to death that if you fell it would be terminal.” On the last day’s race, racers had to find their own way down the big mountain, skiing through two or three villages, taking fourteen minutes. Dick fell into a tree well, had to take off his skis and climb out, “a terrible run on a terrible mountain.” Durrance finished fourth in the tournament, winning a “great big leather suitcase, and that was my treasure for many years...This was the race at which the Europeans first took note that an American racer could be a threat.”³⁶

The two day Arlberg-Kandahar race at St. Anton, Austria, was held in mid-March, 1936, and was “the most important downhill and slalom race in the world,” according to Mrs. Wolfe. There were 155 starters in downhill in this classic European race, including six Americans - Don Fraser, Darroch Crookes, Grace Carter, Ellis-Ayre Smith and Skit Smith. Emille Allais of France won the downhill race and Dick Durrance finished highest of the U.S. men - 8th in the slalom, 15th in the downhill, and 11th in the combined. Austria won the combined overall team titles in both the men’s and women’s events. Fred Pfeifer of Austria tied with Hans Von Allmen of Switzerland for first in the men’s competition, with Emile Allais of France placing third. (Pfeifer would later immigrate to the U.S. to coach the American women’s team and become head of the Sun Valley Ski School). The Americans found the slalom course too difficult in spite of good snow conditions.

The women’s competition was won by Baroness Gratia Maria Margaret van der Oye of Holland. Wolfe said the American women did well in the downhill, with Betty Woolsey finishing 7th, Marion McKean was 9th, and Clarita Heath was 11th. Grace Carter, “Seattle’s girl entry, dropped out before the finish.” “And the beautiful skiing of Dick Durrance was discussed

³⁶ Durrance, *Man on the Medal*, pages 31-33.

in every language.” A number of the U.S. team were made members of the Kandahar Club: Helen Broughton-Leigh and Betty Woolsey had their gold Ks with the Alpha; Marian McKean and Clarita Heath are also gold Ks; and Dorothy Brewer, Faith Donaldson, Lillian Swan, Hannah Locke, Lilo Schwartzenbach and Kathryn Ward are silver Ks. Hannes Schneider is “a good friend to the American racers,” and took a personal interest in the girls training.³⁷



Dick Durrance racing in the famous 1936 Arberg-Kandahar tournament at St. Anton, Austria. Picture from Durrance, *Man on the Medal*.

In *Man on the Medal*, Dick Durrance reflected on his experiences racing in Europe in winter 1936, in the Olympics and other tournaments.

All that racing added up to quite a safari, and I must say those other events were a great deal more fun than the Olympics. The Olympics were too serious...I personally think it's a mistake to put so much emphasis on one race, when actually the way the World Cup is run now - averaging out how you do over the entire year - makes much more sense. You can miss the wax or make a mistake or have a bad day and know it will average out. To

³⁷ “Kandahar Won by Frenchman,” *Seattle Times*, March 15, 1936 (page 5); “Austria Takes Kandahar Race,” *Seattle Times*, March 16, 1936 (page 15); “Ski Meet Gets Largest Entry, Grace Didn’t Finish,” *Seattle Times*, March 17, 1936 (page 15).

have the prestige of the Olympics and all that it means based on one race, or one set of races, is kind of freaky.

On March 20, 1936, the *Seattle Times* reported that Don Fraser and Dick Durrance were buying bicycles in Munich, pedaling to Hamburg, then sailing to Norway to compete in mid-April tournaments. Fraser, Darroch Crookes, Ellis-Ayr and Skit Smith, and Grace Carter had been guests of Italy at several competitions.³⁸

³⁸ “100 Jumpers in NW Ski Meet Sunday, Snoqualmie to be Jammed by Finest Talent, Durrance, Fraser Travel,” *Seattle Times*, March 20, 1936 (page 36).

VII. REFLECTIONS ON THE U.S. PERFORMANCE AT THE 1936 OLYMPICS

In late March 1936, Bill France, “the first of ski internationalists,” returned to Seattle and reported on American skiing at Garmisch-Partenkirchen. All of Germany who saw pictures of Mount Rainier and Mount Baker and their ski terrain want to come over and ski here. Germany’s number one coach wants to come to the Northwest to coach at either Rainier or Baker. “Grace Carter has developed as brilliant a skier as Mrs. Dudley Wolf, the manager of the American women’s team said....She improved more than any other girl on the American team.” The money spent to send Washington’s five men and woman team to the Olympics was well spent. The big shot skiers European skiers use an advanced tempo turn even better than Dick Durrance, America’s number one skier. Durrance is still outclassed by European skiers. France said the U.S. needs to bring German coaches over for the next three years and we would have a chance in the 1940 Olympics. France put in a plug to build ski lifts in the Northwest, which in 1936, had none. “Their aerial trams make downhill skiing easy. We must have trams here - to teach skiers and to catch the international skiing trade, which in Europe is a tremendous business.” The European skiers use Kandahar type bindings with downhill attachments, and a longer ski than the Americans - 7 foot 4 inches to 7 foot 6 inches. The snow conditions in Germany are not as good as in Washington.³⁹

Ed Hunter, one of the Olympian skiers, gave his impression of how the U.S. team fared in the Olympics and the following tournaments in the *American Ski Journal - 1936*.

Although the final results may on the surface of things seem disappointingly low, all of the boys feel that the Americans made quite a creditable showing...Ski sport in America is but barely begun while those against whom we all competed came from countries where

³⁹ “Germany Wants to Visit This Area, Ski Here,” *Seattle Times*, March 24, 1936 (page 19).

it is practically a national sport....all of us improved our technique no end, but the most worthwhile feature of the year was that we became familiar with the European standard of skiing. Now that we know what we are up against in competition and are at least familiar with European techniques, perhaps we can help to bring other skiers into the perfection necessary for placing in the first ten in an international competition.

British Ski Expert Arnold Lunn wrote a letter to the *American Ski Journal* - 1936, giving his impressions of the "American Skiers at the Olympics."

Americans "need not be disappointed with the result" of their teams, in this "first serious attempt to challenge Europeans on their own ground. The object of the American expedition was...to gain experience for future teams..." and "your best skiers did well." He was particularly impressed with Dick Durrance - he was the best skier there from the "lowland countries" i.e. those outside the Alps. "Durrance is an exceptionally fine slalom skier, in the class of the very best." The women's team "were a little disappointing and did not find their true form until later," although Miss Woolsey ran with "great courage and skill." "Results are not everything. Your American teams are a very welcome element in these international ski meetings." American downhill racers "were immensely popular and left the best of impressions wherever they went," which counts more than good racing results."

Lunn blamed the disappointing results of the American skiers at the 1936 Olympics on the lack of ski lifts in the U.S. that are necessary to train more effectively to compete on the international level.

In the United States you are handicapped by a lack of mountain railways and funiculars. To achieve the standard of a FIS or Alrberg-Kandahar winner, a skier needs weeks of practice during which he can have his 10-15,000 feet of downhill skiing in the day. A skier who has to climb every foot is lucky if he can average 4-5,000 feet a day. Indeed, with your variable weather I doubt if your American racers can average 3,000 feet a day

throughout the season.⁴⁰

Alice Wolfe felt the U.S. women's team was young and inexperienced compared to the European teams. "But we Americans are sitting pretty because we are only beginners at this ski game and it takes several years to make a great racer." Betty Woolsey proved that she is a great American skier. Wolfe expected great things from Marian McKean, who began to shine in her last race after the Olympics in the Alberg-Kandahar. "Hannah Lock, Grace Carter and Clarita Heath, all young, will go far with their courage and racing flair."

In his oral history in the Center for Regional History at The Community Library in Ketchum, Idaho, Dick Durrance described racing conditions of that era. Racers bought their own skis, boots and clothes and paid their expenses. They raced for fame, not money, "it was a game." Race rules required the same skis be used in downhill and slalom events, and they were marked to prevent racers from using different length skis. The goal was to win the combined title. Skiers were generalists not specialists as they are these days. Most top skiers were four-way racers, competing in downhill, slalom, jumping and cross-country.

Racers had to climb to starting gates since there were no lifts, which often took two or three hours. There was limited course preparation and racers skied on whatever snow was there. There were few or no control gates in downhill races, only start and finish gates. Racers could pick their own line and be innovative. When a trail curved, Durrance would look for a short cut through the woods. Their biggest problem was not to get lost. His technique was to go straight as long as he could and "don't fall down." Slalom courses were different from modern ones, which

⁴⁰ "American Skiers at the Olympics," *American Ski Annual, 1936*, pages 22, 23. Lunn was a British international authority on ski racing who helped to popularize the sport of slalom racing, was a member of the FIS executive committee for 50 years, and wrote a number of books about skiing and mountaineering.

generally go straight down the fall line. In his day, slalom courses were designed to use irregularities in the terrain and included traverses and hairpin turns.

VIII. LEGACY OF THE 1936 OLYMPICS: SUN VALLEY BECOMES THE OLYMPIC TRAINING CENTER⁴¹

The 1936 Olympic Games had a significant impact on skiing in this country, and the U.S. skiers on the Olympic Team played an important part in developing our legacy of skiing and ski racing. Many played important roles at Sun Valley after it opened in December 1936, which became the country's defacto Olympic training center. Dick Durrance noted its importance in his book, *The Man on the Medal*, by saying he returned to Dartmouth after the 1936 Olympics, where "the next winter promised a full slate of races with Europeans planning to come to the U.S. to try their luck, and that December a place called Sun Valley would open its doors."

In December 1936, Union Pacific Railroad, led by its Board Chairman Averell Harriman, opened the Sun Valley Ski Resort, built for \$1.5 million during the Depression, offering a modern, high class resort experience in the remote mountains of Idaho. Sun Valley was the country's first destination ski resort, known as the "St. Moritz of America," that introduced Alpine skiing and became the country's center of skiing and ski racing. It attracted "the carriage trade," Wall Street barons, the Chicago social set, Hollywood stars and producers and serious skiers from all over the world. The new resort, accessible primarily by train, offered a lavish life style, a luxurious Lodge with high-end shops, a ski school with Austrian instructors that made skiing sexy, and chairlifts that made getting to the top of ski runs quick and comfortable.

Ski racer Dick Durrance said Sun Valley was "the most important influence in the development of American skiing...Its concentrated and highly successful glamorization of the sport got people to want to ski in the first place." The resort had a monopoly on skiing grandeur

⁴¹ Information in this section comes from Lundin, John W., *Skiing Sun Valley: A History From Union Pacific To The Holdings*.

for several decades and it influenced all areas that developed later.



Sun Valley Lodge. Courtesy, The Community Library.

Chairlifts are Invented by Union Pacific Engineers for Sun Valley

Responding to Arnold Lunn's advice about ski lifts, Union Pacific engineers invented the chair lift for the resort, which changed the sport of skiing forever.

Steve Hannigan, Union Pacific's brilliant publicist who created the plan for the new resort, said that "mechanical devices" be installed to carry people to the top of the "slides." Union Pacific engineers created a chairlift based on an overhead mono cable system that had been used to load bananas onto boats. Chairlifts changed the sport.

The *Seattle Times* of June 6, 1937, noted the great benefits that chairlifts offered skiers, allowing them to get in previously unheard of vertical feet of skiing.

Skiers are not made by climbing hills. Skiers develop proficiency by coming downhill. Skiers at Mount Rainier can get in around 4,000 feet of skiing a day. At Sun Valley, with its chairlifts, a skier can get in 37,000 feet a day." Film maker Warren Miller said "now you could finally ski downhill all day long and never have to climb back up. Just sit down in a moving chair and be hauled back up for as many rides as your strength, skill, and money allowed. All...for only a couple of dollars a day.

Betty Woolsey, a 1936 Olympian, in her book, *Off The Beaten Track*, described why Sun

Valley became the major training area for serious racers after it opened.

It's hard to imagine now that in 1939 there were almost no lifts of any kind. These we felt were essential were we to field a decent team for the 1940 Olympics. An exception was Sun Valley, a resort in the Sawtooth Mountains of Idaho...There, on the modest hills of Proctor, Ruud and Dollar, a U.P. engineer had built the first "chair" lifts, patterned after the lifts used in Central America to transport bananas.



Woman riding chairlift, Proctor Mountain, 1937.
Courtesy, The Community Library.



Chairlift, Dollar Mountain, 1937. Courtesy, The
Community Library.

The 1936 U.S. Olympic Team Played Key Roles at Sun Valley

Members of the 1936 U.S. Olympic team played key roles at Sun Valley.

Dick Durrance dominated U.S. ski racing before WWII. He worked at Sun Valley during his Dartmouth summer vacations, designed a downhill race course on Bald Mountain, became a photographer there after graduation, was the editor of the 1939 Sun Valley Ski Club Annual Report, and won three Harriman Cup competitions (1937, 1938 and 1940), gaining permanent possession of the cup.⁴² Alex Bright was on the Board of Governors of the Sun Valley Ski Club and wrote a number of articles for the Sun Valley Ski Club's Annual Report on

⁴² Durrance became manager of the Alta, Utah ski resort in 1940, and the General Manager at Aspen in 1948, helping to bring the 1950 F.I.S. World Championships to the U.S.

races held at Sun Valley. Durrance Mountain and Bright Mountain, north of Ketchum, were named for Don and Alex.

Al Lindley was the first president of the Sun Valley Ski Club, serving from 1936 to 1950. He married fellow 1936 Olympian Grace Carter from Seattle, in 1938, and they were a regular presence at the resort, participating in its tournaments. Grace Carter-Lindley won the 1938 women's Harriman Cup, beating her teammates, the Smith sisters from Tacoma.⁴³

Don Fraser was on the 1937 F.I.S. team that competed in the Pan American Championships in Chile; won the 1938 Silver Skis Race on Mt. Rainier (his future wife Gretchen Kunigk won the women's race); and competed in a number of Sun Valley tournaments. In 1939, Fraser was the resort's special representative for the Midwest territory, headquartered in Omaha. In December 1939, he became Sports Director of Sun Valley, and was Union Pacific's Sun Valley representative in Denver in the early 1940s. Don married Tacoma ski racer Gretchen Kunigk, who trained on Mt. Rainier and at Sun Valley, and was on the 1948 Olympic team. Averell Harriman praised the Frasers' contributions to Sun Valley in his oral history.

Don Fraser played a very important role. He came to Sun Valley in 1937, the second year of its operation ...He had a great deal to do with the development of everything. Both the skiing and the summer time. We owe a great deal to him and his wife, Gretchen...It was the first romance of Sun Valley...I would say that Don Fraser and Pat Rogers [Sun Valley's General Manager] were the two men that perhaps did the most. Don Fraser from the standpoint of the outdoors, and Pat Rogers from the standpoint of the operations of the Lodge and Challenger Inn.

⁴³ In In the 1938 Harriman Cup tournament, the women's field was dominated by Seattle area racers: Grace Carter Lindley, then living in Minneapolis; Mrs. Jim (Skit Smith) Babson of Portland, formerly from Tacoma; and Ellis-Ayr Smith of Tacoma, all members of the 1936 U.S. Olympic ski team. Also included were a young Gretchen Kunigk from Tacoma (who married Don Fraser the following year) and Virginia Bowden from the University of Washington.



1938 Silver Skis winners, Don Fraser and Gretchen Kunigk (later Gretchen Kunigk Fraser). Courtesy, MOHAI.

Tacoma's Smith sisters skied and raced at Sun Valley after they married. Darroch Crookes worked at Sun Valley for years and was on the Sun Valley Ski Club Board of Governors. Betty Woolsey, Sis McKean, Hannah Locke and several other members of the 1936 women's Olympic team, trained at Sun Valley in 1939 and 1940, preparing for the 1940 Olympics, and worked at jobs provided by the resort.

Sun Valley Becomes the Country's Center of Ski Racing

Harriman used ski racing to make his new resort an international destination and the country's center of skiing. Dick Durrance said Harriman "was determined that Sun Valley would match anything Europe had to offer," and he set out to attract the biggest names in the sport. Harriman knew one way to "bring Sun Valley into the public consciousness was to get it onto the sports pages...No expense was spared when it came to promotion." Harriman said competition "was quite important in the development of Sun Valley. It attracted people and, of course, some

of the best skiers in the world came here for those competitions.” Sun Valley paid the expenses of the top skiers to compete at the resort since “we wanted to have an internationally recognized, first class competition,” making its tournaments first class international competitions.⁴⁴

Harriman Cup Tournaments became the country’s most prestigious and competitive events, attracting the best skiers in the world. The *American Ski Annual 1943*, said, “just as it is the dream of every tennis player to compete once at Wimbledon, it is every skier’s hope to participate in the famous Harriman Cup Races at Sun Valley.” The *Sun Valley Ski Club 1956 Annual Report* agreed.

Every American sport has its moment of supreme glory - that particular event in which the entire panorama seems to be compressed into one sharply defined focal point. Baseball has its World Series, golf its National Open and horse racing its Kentucky Derby. For skiing, it is the Harriman Cup...

In March 1937, Sun Valley hosted the first international ski tournament in the U.S., which became known as Harriman Cup tournaments. The tournament included downhill and slalom races and a combined title, attracting the best skiers in the world. The tournament was “an open competition,” with ski instructors meeting amateurs in the same race. Forty-four of the best European and American skiers entered the 1937 tournament - eight ski instructors who were eligible for the open championships and 36 amateurs. Europeans included Norway’s Sigmund Ruud (1928 Olympic silver medalist in jumping); Austrian Hannes Schroll, an instructor at Yosemite (winner of the 1935 National Downhill and Slalom Championships at Mount Rainier); Hans Hauser (Austrian Downhill champion and Sun Valley ski school director); Sigfried Engle, from Kitzbuhel (Hahnenkamm Champion and two time Austrian National Champion, then

⁴⁴ Lundin, John W., *Skiing Sun Valley: A History From Union Pacific To The Holdings*.

Schroll's assistant at Yosemite); Austrian Otto Lang (ski instructor at Mount Rainier and Mount Baker); five other of Sun Valley's Austrian ski instructors; and the five-man Swiss ski team.

Dick Durrance got his revenge from the 1936 Olympics, and showed how skiing in this country had improved, by sweeping the 1937 Harriman Cup, winning the amateur and open titles, beating the best European skiers, the first of his three Harriman Cup victories.



Dick Durrance finishing the Harriman Cup downhill on Durrance Mountain. Courtesy, The Community Library.



Mrs. W. A. Harriman with Dick Durrance, Winner of the United States National Amateur Championships and Sun Valley International Open, both events Downhill, Slalom and Combined.

DOWNHILL RESULTS

1. Dick Durrance, Dartmouth.....	5:01.1
2. *Walter Prager, Dartmouth.....	5:22.4
3. Sverre Kollerud, Norway.....	5:27.0
4. *Hans Hauser, Sun Valley.....	5:28.0
5. Pierre Francioli, Switzerland.....	5:33.0
6. Bob Livermore, Hohebirge, Boston.....	5:50.3
7. *Joe Benedictor, Sun Valley.....	5:56.3
8. Rudolf Gallati, Switzerland.....	6:15.0
9. *Roland Cossman, Sun Valley.....	6:20.0
10. Alexander H. Bright, Boston.....	6:22.3
11. Hjalmar Hivam, Cascade, Portland.....	6:34.4
12. *Ken Syerson, Paradise Valley.....	6:41.1
13. Arnold Kaech, Switzerland.....	6:48.4
14. Emile Cochand, Laurentian S. C. Quebec.....	6:51.4
15. Ted Hunter, Dartmouth.....	7:01.4
16. *Andre Roche, Aspen, Colo.....	7:04.1
17. John Woodward, U. of Washington.....	7:12.2
18. Don Fraser, Wash. Ski Club, Seattle.....	7:20.3
19. Alf Engen, Utah Ski Club.....	7:36.1

16

Dick Durrance getting the 1937 Harriman Cup Trophy from Mrs. Averell Harriman.

Tops

DARTMOUTH SKIER CAPTURES DOUBLE NATIONAL TITLE

By KEN BINNS

SUN VALLEY LODGE, Idaho, Monday, March 15—Here was the record, as the national downhill and slalom ski championships, amateur and open, ended here yesterday:

Combined champion—Dick Durrance, Dartmouth.
Slalom champion—Dick Durrance, Dartmouth.
Downhill champion—Dick Durrance, Dartmouth.

That victory was still the second-day story of a tournament which again taught Northwest skiers a lesson in ski development. Don't call that phrase a cliché.

Northwest skiers, pitching so hard their skis stuttered on flat traverses, trying so hard they shook and groaned as they fought through the finish line, didn't have a chance against the ski-quality they encountered; and yet the lads who beat them confessed they'd rather ski at Mount Baker or Mount Rainier than any other place they have seen.

Hvann Northwest's Best
This hit automatically becomes professorial, because of that. The first Northwest competition in the combined results—downhill and slalom—was Hjalmar Hivam of Portland. He placed eleventh.

Before him, in both events, came any number of skiers—instructors and amateurs. The rest of the Northwest entries, try as they might, trailed.

Two special coach-loads of skiers were en route to the Coast today, headed by Sigmund Rind of Norway, Sverre Kollerud of Norway, Charles Proctor of Boston and Louis Cochand of Quebec. They were going to Seattle because they wanted skiing. Skiing here is over. Skiing in Washington will continue for two months.

But those lads still were tops, and their skiing carried the answer to the Northwest's question: It isn't snow, entirely, that makes skiing. Skiing makes skiing. They had it.

Durrance, born in Florida, taught skiing in Germany. Number 1 ski man in the United States since they turned from jumping to the steep downhill experiment, completed his two slalom runs in 1 minute, 1.3 seconds.

Thompson Sets Course
That was on a Ben Thompson-laid course. Thompson, who

Dick Durrance of Dartmouth made a clean sweep of open and amateur competition in the national championship ski tournament Saturday and Sunday at Sun Valley, Idaho. He won both downhill and slalom events in decisive style over the best amateur and professional talent the country could afford, besides a number of Europe's outstanding performers.

Seattle Times, March 15, 1937

Over the years, Sun Valley hosted all the country's major national ski tournaments: 1937 - the Sun Valley International Open Downhill and Slalom Championships, the country's first truly international ski race; 1938 - the National Downhill and Slalom Championships; 1939 - National Four-Way Championships; 1940 - National Downhill Championships; and 1941 - National Four-Way Championships.

Sun Valley subsidized the training of U.S. ski racers, and became the defacto center Olympic Training Center.

From the late 1930s until the 1950s, Sun Valley played a major role in supporting American ski racing by offering young, talented skiers room and board, jobs and coaching, allowing them to see a life they never experienced before. Annual Intercollegiate Tournaments held over the Christmas holidays brought the best young ski racers to Sun Valley for a week of training with Sun Valley ski instructors, camaraderie, and serious competition, all at Sun Valley's expense.

Contenders for the 1940 Olympics trained at Sun Valley, although the Games were cancelled due to world events. Sun Valley hosted tryouts for the U.S. Olympic teams for the 1948 Games at St. Moritz, Switzerland, the 1952 Games at Oslo, Norway, and U.S. Olympic ski teams trained there for both Games. Tacoma's Gretchen Kunigk Fraser, who trained at Mt. Rainier and Sun Valley, won gold and silver medals in 1948, the first American to win a skiing medal in the Olympic Games. Gretchen Kunigk Fraser and Cortlandt Hill, members of the Sun Valley Ski Club Board of Governors, were managers of the 1952 U.S. Olympic ski teams.

Intercollegiate Race Weeks over Christmas

Beginning in December 1936, Sun Valley hosted Intercollegiate Race weeks, where top

young collegiate racers (both men and women) came to the resort to get training from Sun Valley ski instructors, interact with each other, and compete in high quality races: Three or Four-way competitions for the men and downhill and slalom for the women. All at Sun Valley's expense. This became an important training ground for U.S. ski racers.

The first tournament was held in December 1936, featuring the University of Washington, Pacific Coast champions, coached by Otto Lang; and Dartmouth College, Eastern collegiate ski champions, coached by Walter Prager. The *New York Times* of December 27, 1937, said

[t]he eyes of American skiers will be focused on Sun Valley...when two of the strongest units in the sport, Dartmouth College and the University of Washington...settle the intercollegiate supremacy of this country in skiing.

Dartmouth was the favorite, headed by Dick Durrance, who won the National Downhill and Slalom Championship in Sun Valley the prior spring "over the most brilliant field of down-hill slalom men ever to compete in North America." Dartmouth won the first tournament.



Dartmouth ski team, December 1937. L- R
Dave Bradley, John Litchfield, Steve Bradley, coach Walter
Prager, Howard Chivers, Dick Durrance, & Warren Chivers.
Courtesy, The Community Library.



FROM GENE VAN GUILDER
STEVE BANNAGAN ASSOCIATES
SUN VALLEY, IDAHO
SUN VALLEY, IDAHO --- Against the snow of Sun Valley, Idaho,
the ski team from the University of Washington lines up before
its encounter with the Dartmouth ski sextette, December 31 and
January 1.

U. Washington ski team, Sun Valley, December 1937.

Sun Valley's second Inter-Collegiate ski tournament held in December 1938, was expanded to include skiers from all over the country. Fifty racers entered the tournament from Washington, Dartmouth, Yale, Washington State, Nevada, Utah, Oregon, Stanford, U.C.L.A., College of Puget Sound, and Idaho, where the men competed in cross-country, slalom, downhill and ski jumping. The fun began two weeks before the tournament as racers arrived "for training during the holidays" under Sun Valley ski instructors Friedl Pfeifer, Paul Deschman and Peter Radacher. Christmas eve celebrations included round-table exchanges of gifts, a Gluhwein party hosted by Kathleen Harriman (Averell's daughter) and a tango by Hollywood star Norma Shearer.

The Intercollegiate Tournaments were high points of the early season in Sun Valley before WWII. Kathleen Harriman was a student at Bennington College in Vermont when Sun

Valley, and she came to the resort during her vacations where she became a fashionable companion for her father. She was on Bennington's ski team, won an Eastern Championship and competed in the Intercollegiate Ski Meets in Sun Valley over Christmas. In 1940, her senior year, she "outraced her competitors by a comfortable margin" and was named the best woman skier and the combined winner in the "girls competition," according to an article in the *Sun Valley Ski Club Annual, Season 1940*.



Kathleen Harriman, Sun Valley.
Courtesy, The Community Library.



Kathleen Harriman, Sun Valley. Courtesy, The
Community Library.

The Intercollegiate tournaments grew in size and importance every year, although things changed after the war.

At the first post-war tournament held in December 1946, the large number of racers it attracted made the competitions unwieldy, even for Sun Valley. The tournament became a

victim of its own success. That year, the resort hosted 140 men and women from 25 schools who performed in front of “the cream of the Hollywood film colony, plus a score or more persons representing Europe’s and Park Avenue’s best drawing rooms along with a smattering of American industrialists.” A record 114 skiers entered the downhill race that began above the Roundhouse.

Ski School Director Otto Lang concluded that changes had to be made in the tournament’s format. The field was too large and overcrowded with skiers who were not in condition or ready for the demanding competition. Sun Valley had to be more discriminating, basing entry on past performance. The number of team members from each college needed to be reduced and the downhill course controlled with gates to reduce injuries. Lang was concerned about competitors who arrived after traveling long distances and “rush over to the start of the race course and hurtle themselves down at breakneck speed, far beyond a possible measure of control.”⁴⁵

The last National Intercollegiate meet was held in December 1947, an unfortunate end to tournaments which were “always an exceptionally gay and colorful interlude at Sun Valley.” Eleven colleges sent “the most brilliant field of collegiate skiers ever to have gathered at the Valley,” consisting of nine men’s teams and five women’s teams. The men competed in four events, including cross-country and jumping. The races took place at “scenic Galena Ski Area” because of the lack of snow at Sun Valley. Racers had to climb to the start of the mile-long downhill that had a vertical drop of 1,200 feet, a “genuine test of racing ability.” The slalom

⁴⁵ Lang, Otto, “Fifth Annual Sun Valley Intercollegiate Ski Meet,” *Sun Valley Ski Club 1947 Annual Report*.

took place adjacent to Galena Summit. It was open and long with 25 gates. The cross-country race was a five-mile course that led up the draw past the “weather-beaten Galena Store.”⁴⁶

No Intercollegiate Tournament was held December 1948, an event that had marked the beginning of Sun Valley’s ski season since December 1937. The tournament had given the country’s best college racers the opportunity to experience a fashionable ski resort that was beyond their financial means, train under Sun Valley’s racing instructors, and race against colleagues from all over the country. This was a great loss for college ski racing.

Sun Valley Becomes the Country’s Olympic Training Center

In fall 1938, Alice Damrosch Kiaer Wolfe, the “godmother and self-appointed patroness of the U.S. Ladies Ski Team,” hired Austrian Friedl Pfeifer to coach the U.S. women’s ski team that was training at Sun Valley to prepare for the 1940 Olympic Games. Pfeifer, from St. Anton, Austria, was a top racer who won the downhill and slalom championship at the 1936 Arlberg - Kandahar race, and taught in the Hannes Schneider Ski School at St. Anton. Pfeifer left Austria after Germany took over the country. Harriman hired him to teach for the Sun Valley Ski School and make personal appearances to promote Sun Valley. He became head of the Sun Valley Ski School in 1939. The women’s F.I.S. team trained at Sun Valley in 1939 and 1940, where a number of the skiers worked at jobs provided by the resort.

Betty Woolsey said Averell Harriman invited the women on the U.S. ski team to come to Sun Valley to train under Otto Lang in winter 1939, which she called “our headquarters,” which was the focal point of racing in the U.S. The women were given “jobs of one sort or another. “I was quartered in the Harriman cottage, sharing it with a couple of teammates and Kathleen

⁴⁶ Crookes, Darroch, *The Intercollegiates, Sun Valley Ski Club Annual, 1948.*

Harriman who was training with the ski team,” and became editor of *The Valley Sun*, a weekly publication at the resort, “getting experience that was helpful when I replaced Frank Wensch...as managing editor of *Ski Illustrated*.” Dick Durrance’s wife, Miggs, worked two hours a day at the Opera House taking tickets, while skiing and racing.⁴⁷



Freidl Pfeifer skiing at Sun Valley. Courtesy, The Community Library.



Members of the women’s F.I.S. team in Sun Valley. Sis McKean, Hannah Locke, Betty Woolsey. Courtesy, The Community Library.



Members of the women’s F.I.S. team in Sun Valley. Betty Woolsey, Grace Carter-Lindley, Ann Cooke Taylor, unknown. Courtesy, The Community Library.

⁴⁷ Lundin, John W., *Skiing Sun Valley*



Betty Woolsey racing in the 1939 Harriman Cup Downhill. Courtesy, The Community Library.

The United States learned important lessons from its teams inability to compete with the best European skiers at the 1936 Olympics. U.S. ski officials decided that preparations for the 1940 Olympic Games would be handled differently. Sun Valley would play a major role in preparing the 1940 U.S. F.I.S. and Olympic teams for the World Championships and Winter Olympic Games. Sun Valley supported the U.S. Olympic teams over the years, providing them with a place to train and coaching from its ski instructors.

Preparations began in 1939 to select the U.S. Olympic team for the 1940 Games. In 1939, the women expected to be on the 1940 U.S. F.I.S/Olympic teams trained in Sun Valley, their expenses paid by the resort, where they were coached by Friedl Pfeifer, Alf Engen and others. Gretchen Kunigk (later Gretchen Kunigk Fraser, a 1948 Olympic team member), the up and coming racer from Tacoma, Washington, was one of them. Gretchen said Pfeifer was the best slalom skier she had ever seen. According to Gretchen's biographer,

Gretchen quickly saw the rationale behind some of Pfeiffer's smooth moves and began the difficult process of integrating these into her own technique. Her performance in training was somewhat uneven, but she obviously was the young racer to watch on the 1940 women's team.

Other women who trained at Sun Valley in 1939, included those who were later selected for the 1940 team - Elizabeth Woolsey, Nancy Reynolds, Hannah Locke, Grace Carter Lindsey, Dorothy Hoyt, Marian McKean, Marilyn Shaw, Shirley McDonald and Margaret Jennings (who married Dick Durrance). Men named to the 1940 team who trained at Sun Valley include Dick Durrance, Don Fraser and John Litchfield (named to its Nordic team).

Dick Durrance, who was working for Sun Valley, came to Seattle in August 1939, to discuss the ski resort's plans for the team, and to talk to two Seattle candidates for the American team, Don Fraser and Peter Garrett. Garrett was a Garfield High School graduate enrolled in Yale University.

Sun Valley, the Union Pacific's Idaho resort, wants to employ the eighteen first-string American skiers next winter - legitimate employment too - and at the same time give them training under Friedl Pfeiffer and Peter Radacher, two great European racers, for the more strenuous skiing they'll get in the F.I.S. meet.

Durrance said when the U.S. went to the 1936 Olympics in Germany, they learned that

a hastily-recruited ski team had no chance against the Europeans....They were training for a year. We had only a few weeks. If the team can go to Sun Valley, however, and work on the Bald Mountain downhill course, which needs a lot of work, it can get in condition before the first big snow..and then we can dig in and really learn some skiing before going to Norway.⁴⁸

Betty Woolsey won the 1939 National Downhill and Slalom Championships at Mount Hood, which were also tryouts for the 1940 F.I.S. and Olympic teams. The Timberline Lodge,

⁴⁸ "Durrance is Visitor, U.S. Ski Team Invited to Sun Valley," *Seattle Times*, August 30, 1939 (page 19).

built by the W.P.A, “was an extraordinary building, high up on the mountain and buried in snow.” Betty said the teams were assigned beds, and “we slept many to a room.” Woolsey won the woman’s downhill by nearly ten seconds. They celebrated the race “according to time-honored tradition with appropriate beverages.” Betty was slated to be captain of the 1940 Women’s Olympic team, with a good chance to earn an medal. However, the 1940 Olympics were cancelled due to the outbreak of hostilities in Europe that led to WWII. Betty Woolsey was elected into the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame in 1969. According to her biography,

it has been said the Betty Woolsey was to the American women’s teams, what Dick Durrance was to the men’s teams. A nearly-fearless skier who knew only one speed - all out, and hold nothing back. An ideal leader and teacher who set an example of what true competition really means, under very trying circumstances.⁴⁹



Elizabeth “Betty” Woolsey, photo from U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame.

⁴⁹ <https://skihall.com/hall-of-famers/betty-woolsey/>

1948 Olympic Games

The next Winter Olympics were 1948 in St. Moritz, Switzerland. The selection of the U.S. 1948 Olympic Alpine team began in 1947, with regional tournaments where skiers competed for a chance to enter the final Olympic tryouts held at Sun Valley in March, where the resort provided significant assistance to the team.

In winter 1947, Alf Engen (“skiing’s iron man and winner of every national ski title...who still skis and jumps with great elegance and plenty of speed”) used Sun Valley’s steep slopes to coach six men and five women from the Sun Valley Ski Club for possible Olympic team places. They included Don and Leon Goodman, McCall, Idaho; Gene Gillis, Portland, Oregon; Dave Faires, Seattle Washington; Jack Reddish and Dick Movits, Salt Lake City, Utah; Gretchen Fraser, Vancouver, Washington; Doris Post, Reno, Nevada; Rebecca Fraser, Rutland, Vermont.; Ellen Ulery, Berkley, California; and Alma Hansen, Portland, Oregon.⁵⁰

Gretchen Fraser described Engen’s coaching in her article, “Women’s Racing Comes of Age,” *Sun Valley Ski Club 1947 Annual Report*.

And the old master is throwing everything in the book at these skiers as the rugged training schedule progresses...Alf has outlined a schedule of conditioning and practice which would make the most ardent skier wonder if it is worth it. But all of the team members are working hard in maintaining the program. In the mornings the team skis Mount Baldy non-stop with many turns three or four times and afternoons are spent practicing slalom and jumping on Ruud Mount Alf leads the pack throughout the training, and his ability has served as a great incentive to the team.

Friedl Pfeifer emphasized the need to bring the country’s best skiers together quickly and “scientifically put them through the proper conditioning program,” to train them to compete at

⁵⁰ “Alf Engen to coach Olympic Trainees,” *The Valley Sun*, January 15, 1947.

the international level. “We must work as a unit, as the French, Swiss and Austrians do, in order to give our boys a chance.” Racers should get tough downhill practice on steep long slopes at Sun Valley, Alta or Aspen, and ski “until their legs burn, as that is the only way to condition for the long downhill runs in Europe.”⁵¹

The *Seattle Times* of March 24, 1947, said “11 Western Stars in U.S. Line-up,” as 11 of the 19 berths on the 1948 Olympic team went to Western skiers. Two Washington skiers made the team, Gretchen Kunigk Fraser and Dave Faires as an alternate. The men’s downhill and slalom team had three Salt Lake skiers, George Macomber, Jack Reddish and Dick Movits; and Colin Stewart of Hannover, N.H. Other berths went to Robert Blatt, Palo Alto, California, and three Colorado skiers, Steve Knowlton, Barney McLean, and Gordon Wren. The Nordic combined team included Ralph Townsend, Durham, N.H.; Don Johnsen, Salt Lake City; and Corey Engen, Ogden, Utah, (Alf’s brother). Wendall Broomhall of Rumford, Maine, was on the cross-country team. Five alternates were chosen - Dave Faires; Gene Gillis, Sun Valley; John Blatt, Palo Alto (brother of Robert); William Distin, Stowe, Vermont; and Dev Jennings, Aspen.

The women’s downhill and slalom team was led by Mrs. Gretchen Fraser of Vancouver, Washington, and 14 year-old Andrea Mead of Rutland, Vermont. Others included Paula Kann, North Conway, N. H.; Brynhild Grasmoen, Merced, California; Ruth Marie Steward, Hanover, N. H.; Dodie Post, Reno, Nevada; and Rebecca Fraser, Woodstock, Vermont. Anne Winn of Salt Lake City was an alternate. The team remained in Sun Valley for two weeks of spring skiing to train for the following years Games. The 1948 U.S. Olympic Nordic team also trained in Sun Valley after being selected at the Milwaukee Ski Bowl in Washington.

⁵¹ “Pfeifer Looks at The Olympics,” *The Valley Sun*, February 5, 1947.



1948 Olympic team at Sun Valley. Gretchen Fraser is in the front row on the left. Coaches Walter Prager and Alf Engen are kneeling in the first row. Courtesy, The Community Library.



1948 Olympic women's team at Sun Valley. Gretchen Fraser, Andrea Meed, Paula Kaan and Brynhild Grassmoen. Courtesy, The Community Library.

Olympic Coaches Walter Prager and Alf Engen, in an article in *Sun Valley Ski Club 1947 Annual Report*, said they

will mold a downhill and slalom team capable of giving the European teams a battle all the way...Intense Sun Valley workouts should make the team ski faster, and the coaches 'will attempt to smooth the skiers' styles so the United States runners will be able to clip vital tenths of seconds off their times when they compete at St. Moritz next February."⁵²



Walter Prager and Alf Engen, co-coaches of the 1948 U.S. Olympic team. Courtesy, Marriott Library.

Although not originally selected, in October 1947, Seattle's Don Amick, "the veteran Washington Ski Club speedster," was named to the U.S. Olympic downhill and slalom team. *Seattle Times*, October 12, 1947. Darroch Crooks, in the 1947 Sun Valley Ski Club Report, "Ski Round Up," described the "amazing skiing" of veteran racer Amick "whose trick of coaching himself aloud as he raced down the courses, not only proved highly effective but was also a warning signal for unwary spectators..." "3 Northwestern Ski Stars to Race in Switzerland," said

⁵² Prager and Engen, "Much Depends on Us," *Sun Valley Ski Club 1947 Annual Report*.

the *Seattle Times* of November 23, 1947 - Gretchen Kunigk Fraser, Don Amick and Dave Faires. Gretchen was the team's No. 1 skier and captain of the U.S. women's Olympic team and Faires was an alternate. Dr. Edmund H. Smith of Seattle was the surgeon for the Olympic teams.

Sun Valley played a critical role preparing American skiers to compete at the 1948 Olympics and supporting the U.S. Olympic teams. The U.S. Olympic team received no support from the government, unlike European teams, and depended on private contributions to cover training and travel expenses. In cooperation with the National Ski Association, Sun Valley held a number of fund raising events throughout 1947 and 1948, and raised more than \$9,000. Sun Valley provided lodging for the U.S. teams, its ski instructors coached prospective members of the teams, and the Alpine and Jumping teams trained at Sun Valley in 1947.⁵³

Sun Valley's assistance to the 1948 U.S. Olympic squad was lavishly praised by the National Ski Association and U.S. Olympic Committee. The Olympic team was backed "by the resources of the Union Pacific Railroad and the manpower of Pat Rogers's Sun Valley staffs," support that went well beyond the money raised for the team.

Not only was free accommodation provided for forty men and twenty girls for a week...not only was every conceivable technical preparation planned out without thought or expense (there was even a special man at the top of the Downhill to dust the snow off the competitors' skis as they stood in the gate)...but for months before the Trials promising young runners were given easy jobs at the Valley so that they could train daily for the squad under Alf Engen, and after the Trials, the squad that had been chosen was invited to stay on at Sun Valley for a further two week's intensive training with Olympic coaches Alf and Walt Prager.

Too many take Sun Valley's contributions for granted and don't see the work done by the ski school's Friedl Pfeifer and Fred Iselin, Nelson Bennett's Ski Patrol, and others.

⁵³ "Sun Valley to Aid Olympic Fund Campaign," *The Valley Sun*, January 15, 1947; "P.N.S.A. President's Message," *American Ski Annual 1948*.

Pat Rogers runs the whole Sun Valley plant in such perfect style that skiers imagine the Valley makes a million a year and can afford to be generous to the racers. Actually, it isn't so. Sun Valley only thrives for a few brief months in winter and summer; in between come the slack seasons, with overhead mounting up just the same. From the accountant's point of view, Sun Valley is still a losing venture, so that these huge contributions of manpower and accommodations are out-and-out philanthropy...⁵⁴

The 1948 winter Olympic Games in St. Moritz, Switzerland, were the first since 1936, and the first to feature a full array of alpine events - three men's and three women's races.

The U.S. men's and women's teams were coached by Walter Prager and Alf Engen. The teams trained at Sun Valley, receiving free room and board and coaching. Europeans were expected to win the skiing events, but the training the team received on Sun Valley's long runs prepared them to compete on equal terms.

According to Luanne Pfeifer, Gretchen Fraser's biographer, the women's team were "told to get physically fit on their own over the summer and admonished...not to wear high heels...so our Achilles tendons wouldn't get short." Ski team members were given six pairs of skis for the Olympics, American made, but they were not specifically designed for them.⁵⁵ Kathleen Harriman Mortimer (Averell's daughter) was in charge of the women's uniforms. She had a wardrobe designed for the team by Pikard's of Sun Valley, that was paid for by Katherine and Alice Wolfe, the team manager, which included a grey worsted ski suit, a poplin parka with fur trim, hand-knit sweater by Marjorie Benedicker, Alpaca coats and long, black apres ski skirts.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Laughlin, "Downhill and Slalom Olympic Trials at Sun Valley," *American Ski Annual*, 1948.

⁵⁵ Pfeifer, Luanne, *Gretchen's Gold, The Story of Gretchen Fraser, America's First Gold Medalist in Olympic Skiing*.

⁵⁶ Lundin, John W., "Kathleen Harriman Outfitted the 1948 U.S. Olympic Team," *Skiing History*, September-October, 2021.

The women's team left by ship for the Olympics in early December 1947, and spent three weeks training in Davos, Switzerland. Gretchen described early problems faced by the women's team in "Operation St. Moritz," *Sun Valley Ski Club Report for 1948*. The women were the team's "stepchildren," since the coaches spent their time with the men. The women's team received coaching from a rotation of coaches from the men's team, including eight different men in eight days. "Every day, we were sitting around waiting for one of the boys to come along. And we became very discouraged and mixed up with so many coaches, each pushing a different technique."

Alice Kaier Wolfe, the women's team manager, saw that their training was not going well "and took drastic measures on her own." At her request, an American at the Games donated money to hire Walter Haensli, "the young Swiss star," to coach the women, and Haensli pulled the team together. Haensli said the women had been training too long and hard. He established a different training schedule and worked on waxing issues and improving equipment. There was not enough time to change their skiing techniques, so he "tried to show them little things which would add speed, and, above all, to get them into a frame of mind where they would not be cowed of the competition." He recognized Gretchen's potential and took special pains to work with her.

The Games opened on January 30, 1948. The first women's skiing event was the Downhill, where the U.S. team did not fare well. The highest U.S. finisher was 12th, and Gretchen was 13th.

In the women's Alpine Combined, Gretchen finished fifth in the downhill. In the slalom, racing against "sure winners" from France and Austria, Gretchen finished second, winning a

silver medal, narrowly losing the gold to Trude Beiser of Austria by 37/100 of a point.

“Europeans were stunned,” said Gretchen’s biographer. “Americans were not supposed to win medals in alpine skiing.” Fifteen-year-old Andrea Mead was three seconds ahead of the field at mid-course in the downhill, but fell and did not finish, although she came back to win gold medals in Slalom and Giant Slalom events in the 1952 Olympics at age 19.

In the Special Slalom held the next day, Gretchen faced a series of difficulties, including a malfunctioning timing mechanism. After the timing issue was resolved, “Gretchen plunged off with that relaxed smoothness and awesome power that was her trademark, holding her speed down just slightly - going fast enough to preserve her lead but without undue risk, a beautifully thought-out run.” Gretchen won the race and an Olympic gold medal.

Tacoma native Gretchen Kunigk Fraser was the “unexpected heroine” of the games. Otto Lang, Gretchen’s coach from her early days at Mt. Rainier, and later at Sun Valley (and Director of the Sun Valley Ski School), said

Gretchen Fraser is the Toast of American Skiers and cheered by them whenever they gather in St. Moritz tonight...It was a turning point in American skiing - an historic achievement, considering the field of international competitors.

Her victory was immensely popular at St. Moritz, she was flooded with congratulatory cablegrams and “her room resembles nothing less than a florist’s showroom - simply a mass of flowers.” Gretchen was “in a veritable whirl of excitement and the thrill of becoming an Olympic champion was almost overpowering.”

Lang said the U.S. men failed to live up to the country’s hopes and did not win a medal. Henri Oreiller, “the daredevil French ski ace,” won the men’s Alpine Championship. Jack

Reddish, the highest finishing American, was 12th in the Alpine Combined; Steve Knowlton was 25th; Barney McLean was 26th; and Robert Blatt was 29th.

Gretchen was a natural with the press, even though there was no training given to athletes as is done today. Gretchen told an AP reporter, “I trained at Sun Valley,” and she was thereafter associated with Sun Valley, according to her biographer, Luanne Pfeifer.

The next day, around the world Sun Valley had more publicity than dynamo Steve Hannagan could have ever dreamed up. The resort was on the ski destination maps forevermore. As far as Hannagan & Associates were concerned she was to be referred to as Gretchen Fraser of Sun Valley, Idaho, regardless of the fact that she lived and continued to live in Vancouver, Washington. She raced for the Sun Valley Ski Club, and, after all, had trained in Sun Valley before the war when she lived there.

Otto Lang sent a telegram to Sun Valley saying Gretchen’s performance “was nothing short of sensational. Displaying perfect composure and flawless style, she swept through both runs of an intricate 45-gate pattern without the slightest flutter to top a field comprising the finest women skiers in the entire world.” Her accomplishment was “one of the greatest in the history of American skiing.”

After the 1948 Olympics, Gretchen Kunigk Fraser (married to Don Fraser, a 1936 Olympian), thanked Sun Valley for its contributions to the Olympic Ski Fund, as the resort “did more than its share and was largely responsible for the success of the program, without which no more than a handful of our team members would have been able to make the trip to Europe.”⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Fraser, Gretchen, “Operation St. Moritz,” *Sun Valley Ski Club Report for 1948*.



Gretchen Fraser at St. Moritz. Courtesy, The Community Library.



Gretchen Fraser holding her Olympic medals. Courtesy, Tacoma Public Library.

1952 Olympic Games

In a break of tradition, Sun Valley hosted the Olympic Tryouts in Downhill and Slalom for the 1952 Games in Oslo, Norway, a year before the Games, instead of the same year - “the physical requirements of skiing are such that it is necessary to select the squads a full year ahead of time.” This led to

one of the most exciting weeks in Sun Valley’s history...All during the week the nation’s foremost skiers had been working out on Baldy’s famed terrain, threading their way down slalom courses and executing practice runs for the Downhill. The tenseness which pervaded the contestants was beyond description, for it is a well-accepted fact that a place on the Olympic Team is the dream of every American racer...The eyes of the entire skiing community were focused upon Sun Valley and upon the 40 men and 20 women readying themselves for the big test.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Lane, “The Olympic Tryouts,” *Sun Valley Ski Club Annual for 1951*.

Sun Valley skiers dominated the 1952 U.S. Olympic teams. Five of the ten men belonged to the Sun Valley Ski Club: Richard Buek; James Griffith (Ketchum); Jack Nagel (Seattle); Jack Reddish; and George Hovland. Five of the eight women were Sun Valley Ski Club members: Jannette Burr (Seattle); Sally Neidlinger; Katy Rodolph; Sandra Tomlinson; and Sally Weir. Gretchen Fraser and Corlandt Hill, a member of the Sun Valley Ski Club Board of Governors, were the managers of the 1952 U.S. Olympic teams. Hjalmar Hvam of Portland, Oregon, was the manager of the men's Nordic squad. French skiing star Emile Allais of Lake Tahoe, Nevada, coached the Men's Downhill and Slalom team.



1952 Men's Olympic Team at Sun Valley. Ketchum's Jim Griffith (lower right) was killed in a training accident before the Games began. Courtesy, The Community Library.

The 1952 Olympic team included Ketchum native Jim Griffith, the best skiers ever to come from the Wood River Valley. Griffith was a grandson of one of the original settlers of

Ketchum, Idaho, Albert Griffith, who in 1880, with Isaac Ives Lewis, platted a new town 13 miles north of Hailey, which was named after early explorer David Ketchum. Griffith was a superstar on the Denver University ski team. In 1947, he helped the Colorado State Ski Team win Sun Valley's Intercollegiate Ski Meet, and placed sixth in the Harriman Cup downhill. In the 1949 Harriman Cup downhill, Griffith tied for third behind French star Henri Oreiller and Austrian star Toni Matt, and finished fifth in the Open Combined. In 1950, Griffith was on the U.S. F.I.S. team that competed in the World Championships in Aspen. His entry in the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame says "he was firmly in second place in the Downhill when he took a bone-jarring fall near the finish line. He crawled and clawed across the finish line, not a winner of the race, but a finisher for sure." Jimmy won the downhill at the 1950 National Downhill and Slalom Championships at Sun Valley, beating Ernie McCulloch, Barney Mclean, Toni Matt, Yves Latreille, and Jack Reddish, becoming the National Downhill Champion. He finished second in the Amateur Combined.

In 1950, the National Ski Association sent a two-man team to compete in South America - Jim Griffith from Ketchum, Idaho, a ski star at Denver University, and Dartmouth's Brookes Dodge from Pinkham Notch, New Hampshire. They competed in Bariloche, Argentina, in the Argentinian National Championships and the "Kandahar of the Andes," a race run since 1942 between Argentina and Chile, and at Portillo, Chile. Griffith won every race he entered at Bariloche, and became Champion of South America.



Jimmy Griffith racing in the 1950 National Downhill Championships Sun Valley. Courtesy, the Mary Jane Griffith family.



Jimmy Griffith. Courtesy, the Mary Jane Griffith family.



1950 U.S. F.I.S. team that competed in the World Alpine Championships in Aspen. Both Jimmy Griffith and Brookes Dodge were on the team. Courtesy, the Mary Jane Griffith family.



Jim Griffith and Brookes Dodge, U.S. Ski Team competing in South America, 1950. Courtesy, the Mary Jane Griffith family.



Griffith joined the U.S. Air Force in 1951, after graduating from college, receiving a deferment to train for the 1952 Olympics. He suffered a horrific accident while training at Alta, Utah. He hit breakable crust near a cat track, skidded into a tree, and died two days later on December 6, 1951, in a Salt Lake hospital, at age 22. A replacement was named to the team in his place. The Sun Valley Ski Club established the Jimmie Griffith Memorial Award to go yearly to the Sun Valley Ski Club male racer who “best exemplifies the qualities of sportsmanship and excellence of performance so characteristic of Jim’s racing career. The award was hung in the Sun ValleyLodge.

Jimmy Griffith was inducted into the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame in 1971.

His entry says:

He entered the United States Air Force after graduating from college and was named to the United States Olympic Alpine Team for the 1952 Winter Olympics. While on leave from the Air force, Jimmy was practicing a downhill at Alta, Utah in preparation for the games when he left the high speed turn and badly fractured a leg. A blood clot developed and three days later, on December 6, 1951 Olympic hopeful, Jimmy Griffith, died in a Salt Lake City hospital. He was twenty-two years old.

The winter Olympics were held in Oslo, Norway, in 1952, where the Giant Slalom made its Olympic debut, replacing the combined event. The U.S. cross country and Alpine squads trained at Sun Valley after they were selected. Emile Allais and Herbert Jochum worked with the women's team at Grindelwald. The Nordic team went to Kongsberg, Norway, where jumpers trained under Birger Ruud and Leif Odmark trained the cross-country team.

The big story of the 1952 Games was Andrea Mead Lawrence, who at age 14, was on the U.S. Olympic Ski team in 1948, with Gretchen Fraser, placing eighth in the slalom. In 1952, Andrea married David Lawrence, a former U.S. ski champion. She became captain of the women's team at age 19, replacing Gretchen as the top American skier by winning gold medals in the Slalom and Giant Slalom, "an unprecedented feat for an American skier." The *New York Herald Tribune* said her dual victory "epitomizes the United States coming of age in international skiing competition." Andrea was later on the 1956 U.S. Olympic team, after having three children, where she placed fourth in the Giant Slalom. She was elected to the National Ski Hall of Fame in 1958.⁵⁹

American men failed to win a medal in the Alpine events. The highest placed American was William Beck who placed fifth in the downhill. In the men's downhill, Italian Zeno Colò won gold, Austrian Othmar Schneider the silver, and Austrian Christian Pravda bronze.

⁵⁹ <https://skihall.com/hall-of-famers/andrea-mead-lawrence/>

Norway's Stein Erikson won gold in the Giant Slalom, Pravda the silver, and Toni Spis of Austria bronze. In the slalom, Othmar Schneider won the gold, Eriksen the silver, and Norway's Guttorm Berge the bronze. Austria won seven Olympic medals, the most of any country. "All in all, more American names appear in the upper brackets of the results lists for the Alpine events than ever before." 130,000 spectators watched the events at the Holmenkollen jumping hill.⁶⁰



Andrea Mead, age 14, 1948. Courtesy, The Community Library.



Andrea Mead Lawrence, 1952. Courtesy, The Community Library.

Sun Valley Hires Olympic Stars as Ski Instructors

Averell Harriman's direct involvement with Sun Valley ended in 1940, when he began a life of public service. He became President Truman's Secretary of the Treasury after the war and had to resign his positions with the railroad. As a result, Union Pacific cut its subsidy to operate Sun Valley after WWII, and instituted many cost cutting measures. However, Sun Valley was still the country's only high end ski resort, many of the world's best skiers taught in its Ski

⁶⁰ Herbert, "1952 Olympic Ski Teams." *American Ski Annual and Skiing Journal*, 1953.

School, and its tournaments attracted the best skiers in the world. A number of top European Olympians and racers were hired to be ski instructors at Sun Valley in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Emile Allais (1936 French Olympic team) won a bronze medal in the combined event; was the 1935 silver medal winner in the downhill and combined at the world championships; and was the 1937 triple world champion at Chamonix, France, winning all three events (downhill, slalom, and combined). He taught in the Sun Valley Ski School after WWII from 1948-1949, brought in by Friedl Pfeifer to offer an alternative to the Arlberg system of skiing.



Emile Allais and Otto Lang. Courtesy, The Community Library.

After the 1952 Olympics, Averell Harriman invited “three of the biggest names in international skiing,” to be Sun Valley instructors, “to inject new blood” into the ski school. They included Olympians Stein Eriksen (1952 Norwegian Olympic team - silver medal in slalom, gold in GS, 1954 World Champion in slalom, GS and Combined); Christian Pravda

(1952 Austrian Olympic team - silver in GS, bronze in downhill, 1954 World Downhill Champion); and “our own Jack Reddish” (U.S. 1948). Stein did somersaults at the bottom of Ridge every Sunday to entertain skiers, and Pravda dominated Harriman Cup competitions in the 1950s, becoming the only skier except for Dick Durrance to win three.⁶¹



Sun Valley ski instructors on Baldy, Jack Reddish, Stein Eriksen, Sigi Engl and Christian Pravda. Courtesy, The Community Library.



Stein Eriksen doing a somersault on Baldy. Courtesy, The Community Library.



Christian Pravda racing in the Harriman Cup slalom. Courtesy, The Community Library.

⁶¹ <https://skihall.com/hall-of-famers/stein-eriksen/>

Those three joined other U.S. Olympians who were teaching in the Sun Valley Ski School. John Litchfield, (1940 Olympic Nordic team) - Sun Valley Ski School instructor 1940-1942, 1949-1952, Ski School director 1950 & 1951; four-way competitor at Dartmouth; second in 1942 U.S. Downhill and Slalom championships.⁶²



John Litchfield, Sun Valley Ski School Director 1950-1951. Courtesy, the Community Library.

Barney McLean (1948 Olympic team, where he was Captain); assistant director of SV Ski School; 1942 - Eastern Downhill and Slalom Champion, Harriman Cup winner, and National Downhill and Slalom Champion; 1948, second in National Downhill and Slalom Championship in Sun Valley; coach 1950 F.I.S. team at Aspen. Elected to the U.S. Ski Hall of Fame, 1959.⁶³

⁶² <https://skihall.com/hall-of-famers/john-p-litchfield/>

⁶³ <https://skihall.com/hall-of-famers/robert-l-barney-mclean/>



Barney McLane

Jack Reddish (1948 Olympic team), 1945 Alta Cup winner; 1947 Bradley Cup winner as Sun Valley as best collegiate skier; 1st place in 1947 Olympic tryouts in the downhill; 1948 National Downhill and Combined Champion; 1949 Harriman Cup winner. Jack was elected to the U.S. Ski Hall of Fame, 1969.⁶⁴



Jack Reddish, courtesy Alf Engen Museum.

⁶⁴ <https://skihall.com/hall-of-famers/jack-reddish/>

Corey (Karre) Engen (1940 & 1948 Nordic teams - captain and top placing American in 1948); Four-Way competitor, 1942 National Nordic Champion; Alta Snow Cup winner 1945 & 1946; winner of 200 trophies in alpine and nordic competitions. He was elected to U.S. Ski Hall of Fame in 1973, joining his brothers Alf, Sverre and nephew Alan Engen.⁶⁵



Engen brothers jumping at Sun Valley's Ruud Mountain, 1940. Courtesy, the Engen family.

The Sun Valley Ski School also employed a number of the world's top skiers who had not been Olympians in their home countries, such as Austrian Sigi Engl (Hahnenkamm Champion, two time Austrian National Champion, Sun Valley Ski School Director after John Litchfield from 1952-1972), Canadians Ernie McCulloch and Yves Latreille, and many others.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ <https://skihall.com/hall-of-famers/corey-engen/>

⁶⁶ <https://skihall.com/hall-of-famers/sigi-engl/>

Stein Eriksen spent a year teaching at Sun Valley and competing for the Sun Valley Ski Club, but Christian Pravda taught there into the 1960s, continually setting a high standard for the Harriman Cup races. His phenomenal downhill run in the 1956 Harriman Cup was described by Blakslee in "The Harriman Cup," *Sun Valley Ski Club 1956 Annual*.

Christian ran the entire course in masterful fashion, whizzing down the schusses as if guided by a plumb line and setting himself up to reach the control gate so as to reduce drift to an absolute minimum...So perfect was the skier's line that it seemed he, too, was unaware of these obstacles and was simply racing down the slope in a track of his own choosing. Here was downhill skiing in its ultimate form, serving once more to confirm the fact that Christian Pravda is one of the truly great stars of all time.

However, in the 1957 Harriman Cup, Pravda was put to shame by Austrian Toni Sailer, winner of three gold medals in the 1956 Olympic Games.

The 1957 Harriman Cup "had one of the most exciting fields of foreign racers in the history of the race." The best Alpine competitors in the world from Austria, Switzerland, Italy and France competed, along with U.S.'s Buddy Werner. Two words describe the event, "Toni Sailer."

Ever since his triple win in the '56 Olympics the famed Austrian had become the Ben Hogan, the Lew Hoad and the Mickey Mantle of skiing, all rolled into one...[E]ven among the hard core of super skiers this personable young man from Kitzbuhel constituted the color, the glamour, the focal point which set this tournament apart.

The two-mile downhill course, with 2,500 feet of vertical drop, had eleven control gates, six in Rock Garden and five on Exhibition. Buddy Werner took a spectacular fall on Exhibition after running the top portion in beautiful style. "A big bump tossed him into a violent egg-beater, thrashing him around for another 40 yards or so." He finished but was out of contention. Sailer won the downhill in

characteristic style, seemingly relaxed and out for a little fun skiing...he had every foot of the course firmly photographed in his mind...His descent of Exhibition was one that will always be remembered at Sun Valley - not simply because of the precise nature of his line but even more because of the masterful control displayed throughout...[H]e had the mogles [sic] working for him, floating over them rather than fighting the way through...I doubt if I shall ever see a finer downhill run than that displayed by this great champion...

Christian Pravda was eight seconds behind. "That a skier - even a Sailer - could pick up eight seconds on Christian Pravda in a two-and-one-half-minute downhill is something no one could ever believe if he had not actually seen it accomplished." Switzerland's Roger Staub was second.

"Toni Sailer took all events in the men's race and made history by his superb form and speed" to win the 1957 Harriman Cup. In the slalom, Sailer had "two magnificent runs...Toni's slalom is truly something to watch - powerful and driving." Pravda and Kitzbuhel's Anderl Molterer tied for second, and Buddy Werner was fourth, finishing "more than ten seconds behind the leaders." Switzerland's Freida Dancer won the women's downhill, Norwegian Inger Bjornbakken won the slalom and France's Therese Le Duc won the women's combined.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Blakslee, "The Harriman Cup," *Sun Valley Ski Club 1957 Annual Report*; Lundin, John W., *Skiing Sun Valley: a History from Union Pacific to the Holdings*.

