

Endless Winter

BY EDITH THYS MORGAN



Led by top racers like Pepi Stiegler, Stein Eriksen and Erich Sailer, summer ski camps were once a booming business at resorts across western North America. From as many as 18, the number of ski areas hosting them has dwindled to a few.



PHOTO COURTESY TIMBERLINE

U.S. summer ski camps got their start in 1956 at Timberline Lodge on Oregon's Mount Hood. Today, with two chairlifts, more than 20 training lanes and additional freestyle terrain, Mount Hood (above) is still ground zero for the North American summer ski-camp scene.

From early June to mid-August, the parking lot at Timberline Lodge is ground zero of the North American summer skiing and riding scene. By 7 a.m., vans are thundering up the six-mile access road from Government Camp, Oregon, to unload their cargo of ski racers, freestylers and snowboarders. Before the sun's rays have hit Palmer Snowfield—the glacier that hangs beneath Mount Hood's summit crater—campers are hauling their gear and overflowing backpacks past historic Timberline Lodge to the Magic Mile chairlift. By the time the lift opens at 8 a.m., their coaches have already trekked 2,500 vertical feet, beneath the Mile and Palmer lifts, to start setting and salting on one of 20-plus designated lanes.

U.S. summer ski camps got their start at Timberline in 1956, but many other Western areas soon followed and built what was once a robust offering. The 1974 spring issue of *Skiing Magazine* listed summer camps at 18 different areas. These ranged from Mount Baker in Washington, where Olympic silver medalist Franz Gabl ran summer camps throughout the 1960s, to Squaw Valley in California, where top racers convened in the 1970s for training and a Fourth of July race. Also in the 1970s, Pepi Stiegler ran camps atop Jackson Hole and at Arapahoe Basin, while Ken Corrock led camps at Grand Targhee and Snowbird and many other prominent skiers offered camps throughout the West.

By contrast, the "School's Out, Skis On" guide published in April 2016 by *Ski Racing*—the go-to resource for commercial summer ski camps—lists Mount Hood as the only U.S. site for mid-summer on-snow camps (go to <http://www.skiracing.com/premium/schools-out-skis-on>). As the ski industry has matured and competition has heated up, the summer training scene has shifted to the Southern Hemisphere (New Zealand, Australia, Chile and Argentina) and the glaciers of Europe (Zermatt, Sass-Fee, Les Deux Alps, Soelden and

Tignes, to name but a few).

"Summer training remains a booming business abroad," says two-time Olympian Ken Read, former president of Alpine Canada. "Some of the early North American camps simply were not financially viable. Those that survived have had to consolidate or adapt." That brings us back to Mount Hood, where the U.S. summer skiing scene started.

TIMBERLINE (MOUNT HOOD), OREGON

Summer racing camps have been held on this 11,239-foot frosted cindercone since 1956, the year after Richard L. (R.L.) Kohnstamm took over operations of the long-neglected Timberline Lodge. Encouraged by a summer skiing segment featuring Fred Iselin in Warren Miller's film *Have Skis, Will Travel*, shot high on the mountain in 1955, R.L. recruited European coaches to start a "summer racing school." Along with Pepi Gabl and Erich Sailer, Timberline's first and second ski school directors respectively, the early coaching roster included Anderl Molterer, Toni Spiess, Karl Schranz, Ernst Hinterseer and Pepi Stiegler. Young skiers who wanted access to summer skiing and top coaches stayed in the lodge (dorm beds were \$2.50 a night midweek, \$3 on weekends) and rode Tucker Snocats from the top of the Magic Mile chairlift to a variety of portable "platter pull" surface lifts.

As more racers used the training space, Timberline's growing roster of Austrian and American coaches encouraged Kohnstamm to look at the explosion of summer skiing in Europe—in places like Hintertux, Zermatt, Stelvio and Kitzsteinhorn—and consider installing a chairlift suitable for glacier skiing. Kohnstamm credited former U.S. Ski Team coach Hank Tauber with finally convincing him to build the Palmer Chairlift in 1979. The lift blew down the first winter, and had to be retrofitted with tripod legs, but the Timberline Summer Racing Camp grew to 300 kids the next summer and the U.S. Ski Team committed to training there.

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COURTESY TIMBERLINE



Above: In the late 1950s, summer skiers rode a variety of conveyances to 10,000 feet on Mount Hood, including a cable attached to grammar-school seats on skis.

COURTESY ERICH SAILER



Left: Pepi Gabl and Erich Sailer (far right) led a roster of top European coaches at Timberline.

Tauber sought an exclusive for his summer camps, but R.L. wanted a free-market model, with independent operators in addition to Timberline's own camps. Among them was Mike Annett, who moved from the East Coast to run his Mount Summer Ski camps in 1979. From 1979 to 1981 his camps grew from 20 to 200 clients, and has hosted as many as 1,400 campers of all abilities per summer. Even as Timberline manages its own 20-plus lanes of commercial camps, it still maintains a wide public lane and freestyle terrain for anyone who has the itch to take a few runs.

The winter of 2014-2-15, described by Jeff Kohnstamm (R.L.'s son, who now runs Timberline) as "among the worst five since 1955," meant that Timberline's skiing operations closed August 2 and ran on vastly limited terrain. This year, with ample snowpack—the top of the Palmer was buried under 50 feet of snow in March—operations will resume and be, as Annett notes, better than normal.

Erich Sailer will return to Mount Hood with his camps, as he has every year since 1995; famous alumni include Lindsey Vonn, Julia Mancuso and Kristina Koznick. Hermann

Goellner, who has coached commercial and national team camps at Hood since the early 1970s—sometimes leading 60 kids to the summit of the mountain after their morning of training—still works the lanes. One thing that has changed is the average age of campers. "It used to be 15 years and up," says Sailer, "but now it's 15 years old and down." Maybe it's a sign of people being too serious, or maybe it's a sign that people know where the real fun is.

To get more information about Mount Hood summer skiing, call 503-272-3311 or go to <http://www.timberlinelodge.com/summer-snow>.

Inspired by the Mount Hood model, camps soon sprung up all over the West, following Timberline's formula: Find a patch of snow, get a famous name, build a program and they will come. Here's a rundown on some of the earliest and most successful summer racing camps in North America.

WHISTLER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

In 1965, in preparation for Whistler's first winter of operation,

Norwegian Ornulv Johnsen was appointed chief instructor of the Garibaldi Ski School. With the vast, snow-filled Whistler Bowl—served by a T-bar from top to bottom, with terrain to challenge all levels of skiers—"we knew we had an ideal setting to host a summer ski camp," says Johnsen. He was charged with making it happen.

Johnsen knew they needed a big name and contacted 1952 Olympic gold and silver medalist Stein Eriksen. "He was very keen, but had already made other commitments [to work at Crystal Mountain]," says Johnsen. "Also, he said 'No Austrians,' which I could not guarantee." At the suggestion of the local Kneissl and Hart rep, Bud Ryckman, Johnsen contacted Swiss freestyle sensation Art Furrer. The first 1966 Art Furrer Summer Ski Camp, aimed at racers and freestylers, spontaneously expanded to two camps, due to popular demand.

Johnsen left Whistler after that first year, but his ski-school colleagues Roy Ferris and Alan White built on his success for many years thereafter with Toni Sailer's Summer Ski Camps. Recruited by Ferris and White in the fall of 1966, Sailer headed the camp for 17 years, bringing on high-profile coaches like Nancy Greene and Wayne Wong. The original camps operated in the Whistler Glacier Bowl above the Roundhouse.

In 1984, the camps were re-named the Dave Murray Summer Ski Camp—after the Crazy Canuck downhill champion and Whistler skiing director who was an early student at Sailer's camps. Today, the camps are aimed more at freestyle and snowboarding, and are located on the gentler slopes of the Horstman Glacier on Blackcomb.

Elsewhere, the Canadian Ski Association ran a summer camp for the national team and prospective junior racers on the Kokanee Glacier near Nelson. Established in 1966, the camp moved to Whistler in 1970, sharing terrain with Toni Sailer before being discontinued.

See the full list of Whistler summer camp offerings at whistlerblackcomb.com or call (800) 944-7853.

CRYSTAL MOUNTAIN, WASHINGTON

In 1966, Jack Nagel—a 1952 Olympian and then director of Crystal’s Mountain’s Ski School—teamed up with Stein Eriksen to put on three 10-day summer camps, for 80 campers per session. All three alpine events—slalom, giant slalom and downhill—were on the agenda, which was aimed at youngsters with at least some racing experience. Training took place on Crystal’s highest chairlift-served slopes, before the spectacular backdrop of Mount Rainier. An added feature was Nagel’s revolutionary use of closed-circuit instant-replay television coverage, viewable by campers in a portable ski-in, ski-out booth. Nagel’s daughter Judy competed in the 1968 Olympics and went on to win three World Cup races (with a dozen podiums), finishing sixth overall in 1970. The cost for ten days, all-inclusive, was \$225.

Other camps that started at Crystal included the popular Airborne Eddie freestyle camps, which first started in 1973 and later expanded to Colorado, Wisconsin, Canada and Europe. The camps dwindled out in the late Seventies,

and today, due to the challenge of creating a hard training surface, the local ski club opts for summer training at Mount Hood.

RED LODGE, MONTANA

The Silver Run Ski Club hosted training and racing on the Gardner Lake Headwall from approximately 1953 to 1960, and its “High Road Summer Slalom” races were sanctioned by the Northern Rocky Mountain Ski Association. But the area got on the national summer skiing radar in 1967 when Anderl Moltner, Pepi Gramshammer and Erich Sailer, among the early Austrians at Timberline, started the Red Lodge International Summer Race Camps.

“Somebody told Pepi about Red Lodge, so I went to check it out,” recalls Sailer. At first he found no snow. “But I went up again and discovered the Twin Lakes Headwall. It was steep—too steep. We had to prep it ourselves because no snowcat could get on it. But we made it work for 25 years.”

At its peak the camp, served by two portable surface pomas, accommodated 640 campers in four

10-day sessions. In 1991, Gramshammer sold the camp to Gunther Jochl, who ran it as a downhill camp before selling it to Rob Hart and Kurt Hallock in 2002. Open to public skiing since 2004, the area—all on federal land and now known as Beartooth Basin—has racers, a terrain park, a bump camp and a big mountain camp that utilizes the cornice and cliffs in their permit area. Snow permitting, the portable facility comes to life with a generator, power cables, poma seats and trailers (www.beartoothbasin.com).

Meanwhile, other camps flourished on the other side of Beartooth Pass. During the 1960s, for example, Middlebury College ski coach Bob Sheehan and his partner, John Hitchcock, ran a successful camp at Daisy Pass. They hauled portable rope tows up a Jeep trail and coached racers in June on a rolling slope above treeline. “We used four-wheel-drive Army vehicles to haul gear, coaches and about 30 kids up the mountain every day,” said former Midd racer and camp coach Bill McCollom in an article by Lisa Densmore in the *Journal of New England Ski Museum* (Issue 89, Spring 2013). “Some days we had fresh powder, other days corn snow. And sun! It was great fun.”

MAMMOTH MOUNTAIN, CALIFORNIA

In 1960, Dave McCoy already had a following of junior racers who would continue skiing at Mammoth after the lifts closed each spring. “Right after school ended in June, Dave told 20 or 30 of us to ‘Come on up,’” recalls Robin Morning, a junior racer at the time who went on to the U.S. Ski Team. These were McCoy’s own kids as well as others of all ages. “We stayed in dorms on the third floor, got up at 5 a.m and rode in Jeeps and trucks up the mountain.” If there was enough snow, McCoy ran Chair 3. If not, kids hiked up for slalom sessions in West Bowl and St. Anton. They quit by 11 a.m., stashed their gear and either rode in trucks or ran down the mountain for an afternoon workout. “Dave gave us all jobs around the

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PHOTO BY MIKE DEDERER

Jack Nagel, a 1952 Winter Olympian, teamed up with Stein Eriksen (at far left in group photo above) to put on 10-day summer camps at Crystal Mountain. Nagel used closed-circuit instant-replay television coverage to show campers their runs in a portable ski-in, ski-out booth.

PHOTO BY MIKE DEDERER



TRACKS OF PASSION / ROBIN MORNING



Above: Mammoth junior racers at a summer competition on Mount Hood, left to right: Wendy Allen, Cathy Allen, Dave McCoy, Steve Thompson, Poncho McCoy, Richard "Toot" Joslin, John Bruder, Rick Chaffee. Right: Summer training on West Bowl at Mammoth Mountain.

TRACKS OF PASSION / ROBIN MORNING



area, from painting to picking up trash on the road to throwing rocks [a stand-by ski area job] to helping build the gondola," Morning says.

McCoy's summer sessions lasted about three or four weeks. When Penny McCoy won a silver medal at the 1966 World Championships in Portillo, many credited her summer skiing. "She was on her game at that time of year," explains longtime Mammoth coach and former USST Alpine Director Dennis Agee. In 1969, when Agee started coaching the U.S. women's ski team, he encouraged McCoy to invite top regional skiers from across the country—roughly 80 women and 110 men and their coaches—to summer training. "Dave comped the whole thing," recalls Agee. "A local hotel owner comped all the lodging, and we ran downhill from the top of gondola to the bottom." From then on, Mammoth was on the radar with ski racers everywhere. "Mammoth and Bachelor," Agee adds, "really had passion for ski racing."

Robin Morning muses that when interviewing people for *Tracks of Passion*, a coffee-table book about Dave McCoy and Mammoth Mountain, and asking for favorite memories, "everyone included summer training. There was no pressure, and so much good energy—it was an amazing time." Jimmie Heuga hosted a com-

mercial "Lange" camp in 1970, and in 1973 the Annie Famose Rossignol camps debuted. In 2016, the 42nd annual Rossignol Spring Ski Camp was held at Mammoth April 30-May 7, and race training at the mountain was expected to continue until June.

For more information on the Rossignol camp, go to www.RossignolCamp.com or contact Doug Smith (760-648-7512; doug.smith@rossignol.com). For information on racing at Mammoth, go to www.mammothmountain.com

MOUNT BACHELOR, OREGON

Summer skiing could be a revenue source, but also a way to put a ski area on the map. The latter was true with Bachelor Butte—since renamed Mount Bachelor—a ski area "in the boonies" near Bend, Oregon. Owner Bill Healy, who had opened the area in the fall of 1958, enticed Bob Beattie to bring his first crop of U.S. national team racers to train at Bachelor in the fall of 1963. Among them were Gordi Eaton and Chuck Ferries, who remember staying in the rustic, unheated Elk Lake Lodge past the mountain, training slalom in the morning and going for long, scenic mountain runs in the afternoon. Beattie, who routinely brought his University of Colorado and national team athletes to Colorado's Saint

Mary's Glacier on fall weekends, placed a huge emphasis on physical training. Beattie returned to Bachelor with the national team thereafter in late spring/early summer, and Healy did everything he could to accommodate them on a snowfield accessed by a rope tow.

Kiki Cutter, who grew up in Bend and belonged to the Skyliners winter sports club, remembers sitting on the rocks, watching the U.S. Ski Team train on her hometown hill and wanting to join in. Soon she was able to run courses following Billy Kidd, Buddy Werner and Jean Saubert, and she became the first American to win a World Cup event—a slalom in Oslo in February 1968. When Beattie retired from the U.S. Ski Team in 1969, he and Eaton immediately started running commercial Bob Beattie summer camps, coached by a stable of retired U.S. Ski Team athletes, including Cutter. "My favorite part was the enthusiasm of those kids," says Cutter. "They practically slept in their ski boots."

Summer camps resumed at Bachelor in 2012 after a 13-year pause. They are run after the mountain has closed to the public, typically in June. For information, e-mail info@mtbachelor.com (attention Summer Race Camp Coordinator) or call 541-829-2442. ❄️