

Andy Stenvold died Sat. 27.
March, 1965.
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Skiing In The Similkameen



BY

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dates back to 1929,

2nd skiing, as an organized sport, began in 1929, but its history in Simikame valley goes back to 1913.

Similkameen is that area of British Columbia drained by the Similkameen and Tulameen rivers. For historical purposes, it may be defined as the country east of Hope, west of Penticton, and south of Merritt to the International Boundary line. It is a land of river benchlands, rolling hills, and precipitous heights; the kind of a country to delight the heart of a skier. Princeton, in the forks of the two rivers is the heart of the valley. It has a population nearing the 2,500 mark, and is the meeting and marketing point for a number of lesser towns in the valley. Coalmont, Blakeburn and Tulameen to the west; Allenby and Copper Mountain to the south; Hedley, Nickle Plate and Keremeos to the east, are, for the most part, mining centres tributary to Princeton. Organized skiing in this district is little more than ten years old, but skiing as a means of transportation in Similkameen goes back to April, 1913.

A. O. Johnson ran a store in Coalmont during 1921-23, and in 1921 procured from Spalding in Vancouver, through the Hudson's Bay Company, some pairs of skis. They were returned, however, being considered too dear for local sale. They were \$30.00 a pair. Later, Mr. Johnson got 3 dozen skis from Hume of Reveltoke. They were the first factory-made skis to be sold in Coalmont. Costing \$13.00 a pair (without harness) they were the "Norland" skis, made in Minneapolis. While at Phoenix in 1910 Mr. Johnson had imported skis from Norway, through Morrin and Thompson—the "Hagen" skis, som-

ing from Oslo, Norway's capital, then known as Christiania. Long before that Andy had used homemade skis at the Rambler mine in the Slocan country.

Let us begin at the beginning. In an article on "Pioneering on Skis in Canada" (Norse Canadian, January, 1939, p. 9) Nels Nelson notes that Claus Jeldnes was the first ski-jumper in Canada in 1898-99. "Organized Skiing, however, started with the formation of the Phoenix Ski Club, the first in Canada. Andy Johnson, now of Princeton, was the first President; other charter members were Engvald "Minnie" Engen, now C. P. R. conductor, of Penticton; Andy Stenvold, Hans Christensen, Albin Nelson, Gust Eklof, Charles Eklof and others. When Phoenix folded up, they moved en bloc to Princeton, where they started the Princeton Ski Club"

It should be noted, however, that quite a number of years elapsed before the formation of the Princeton Ski Club. Long before this skiing had been used as a means of transportation in the valley. Hans Freiding claims to be the first man to ski in Similkameen. In the fall of 1912 he bought the first pair of skis through S. R. Gibson, who was then proprietor of the Princeton hardware store. In March, 1913, Hans was at Copper Mountain. He received a message that his wife was ill and skied by moonlight from Copper Mountain to his home in Princeton. A son was born to Hans and Mrs. Freiding, on 6th April, 1913. Thereafter followed fifteen years before skiing became an organized sport in the valley. Since

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then it has achieved a popularity far surpassing the hopes of its founders. Writing in the Canadian Ski Year Book, 1938, p. 172, of the Western Championship, held in Princeton that year, Dr. J. D. Butler reports (with commendable exaggeration) that in a population of 1,500 "there are about 1,400 skiers (the other hundred are under a year old)" The population has increased since then, and skiing has increased in proportion.

The meeting which finally gave form to what had long been a dream of enthusiasts was called to meet in Princeton in the Scandinavian hall (now the Elks hall). A. O. Johnson, the genial proprietor of the Tulameen Hotel, was in the Chair, and expressed the hope that a live club would be formed. Asbjorn Krogsaad was secretary of the meeting. J. A. Brown and A. O. Johnson were nominated honorary Presidents, and A. Stenvold and Ivar Knudsen President and vice President. This was on 27th, January, 1929. The second meeting was held in the dining room of the Tulameen Hotel on the 2nd, February, 1929. This began with an interesting debate as to the language to be used at Club meetings. Some found difficulty in expressing themselves in the English language, but it was unanimously agreed that English should be the language of the Club; and that the members would have the privilege of using any of the Scandinavian languages if they found this a better medium of expression, but all such languages would immediately be translated into English. Since then all members hailing from Scandinavian

countries have become so proficient in English that the services of an interpreter are no longer necessary. At this second meeting details of the first Ski race to be held the following day were completed. Minnie Engen and A. Stenvold seem to have been the moving spirits in this first public display of skiing in Similkameen. J. Olsen came first in the 24 mile race; B. Ness first in the 12 mile; and Gordon Freiding first in the Juniors. Andy Johnson and Ivar Knudsen shared in the honours of the day. By the end of February the Club boasted of over 100 members.

Later in our story reference will be made to the part played by the ladies in organized skiing, but the following minute reveals how early in its history the men of the Princeton Ski Club realized that they could not succeed without the help of the ladies:

"The 6th of February (1929) . . .

Yes sir. The ladies will be permitted to enter the Ski-club, and the ladies should have their own committee in the club, because if we are going to tell the truth, everyone of us will be saying, there is and never will be a real club, whatever it is, without the ladies because they know how to handle the refreshment and at the same time they know how to handle a successful dance, etc. . . . The ladies in charge of the last dance were Mrs. Jacobson, Mrs. Stenvold, Mrs. Carlson and Miss M. Brown."

On the 22nd, February, 1929, at a meeting in the Scandinavian hall, a committee of ten was appointed

to investigate and recommend the best hill in the district for jumping. J. Carlson was named convener of the committee which included I. Knudsen, J. Olson, A. Krogstad, O. Carlson, J. A. Brown, A. Sorenson, C. V. Prosser, J. Hansen and H. McInroy. A. Senvold was a member ex officio, and Minnie Engen assisted. After much searching the present hill was recommended. It is on the south side of the Similkameen River, and about two miles east of Princeton. The Princeton Golf Club had the flat below and arrangements were completed that the Ski Club should have the use of the flat during the winter months. At subsequent meetings during this first season ways and means were debated of making the hill the attraction it promised to be.

The hill recommended has since justified the wisdom of those who made the selection. Before the first big tournament could be held much planning and organizing were necessary, and the hill had to be put in shape. This involved "high finance." The extracts which follow were taken from an undated circular letter which was wisely distributed. They reveal the high hopes with which the members faced the future:

"It is the ambition of the officers and members of the Princeton Ski Club to make the Similkameen Valley the centre of attraction for winter sports, not only for the residents of the Similkameen Valley, but for the Province at large. . . .

And so it is with the sale of tickets of the present drive

of the fund campaign for a good sale for the Prize Drawing Dance to be held in the Orange Hall at Princeton, on Friday, September 27th, 1929, that we ask your support, and so help the thing along, and on the 27th, of Sept., there is going to be over "SIX HUNDRED DOLLARS" worth of Prizes given away, the first prize being a beautiful Restmore Chesterfield Suite, re anywhere in the Province at \$275. . . .

The Princeton Ski Club have the Jumping Hill well ~~away~~ under construction, and when completed there is no other hill in Canada that can compare with it for Ski Jumping, the hill was selected by the well known Ski Jumper Mr. Engen, and it might be said that he is the "Daddy of Ski Jumping in B.C." the hill is of a natural jump curve, and the jumper can be seen from the start to the finish of the jump, and there is plenty of hill to jump 260 feet, and it is hoped that the world's record of 240 ft will be broken on this hill by 1931 the tournament taking place in January 1930, which is going to be another Red Letter day in the history of the Similkameen Valley."

Before the date announced in the above letter a paragraph in the local paper acquainted its readers with the fact that the whole scheme had been cancelled. In the fall of that year, 1929, Minnie Engen was elected to the Chair, with Jack Taylor as Vice-President. On

that occasion fitting tribute was paid to Mr. Slenfold as the Club's first President. He still continues to take an active interest, and his son, Carl, is the present efficient secretary. Financing continued by less spectacular methods, progress on the hill was good, and by December were all eager for the first snowfall. The snow came some time before Christmas—plenty of it—and continued to fall at intervals. On the last Sunday of 1929 Ivar Knudsen and Minnie Engen tried the big hill. There had been quite a thaw and the hill was not in good shape for experimenting, but both Engen and Knudsen went over the top to the echo of "Look out below." Engen hurt himself rather badly, wrenching his back, and was confined to bed for some days. Ivar was hurt too, but not sufficiently to keep him at home. On the following Monday the writer went to see Mr. Engen. He was still in bed, but quite determined "that hill won't get me." It was a surprise to many that he was back on deck for the official opening on New Year's Day 1930. The star jumpers on this date were Mello McKenzie of Revelstoke (the Flying Scotchman), and Ivar Knudsen. Each made two jumps and two spills. Minnie Engen was Director of Ceremonies. This served as a good introduction to the big tournament planned for the end of the month. It was determined that there would be no repetition of the New Year's day spills, and much work was done on the hill during the interval. A 35-foot scaffold was erected, and the take-off extended two feet.

In preparation for the first "big event" there were endless meetings. The problem of accommodation for visiting skiers was complicated by the fact that on the night of Monday, 20th, January, 1929, the Similkameen Hotel was burned to the ground. Fire broke out that night while a Board of Trade meeting was in progress and the temperature outside was more than twenty below zero. The citizens of Princeton rallied to the occasion, and opened their homes to those who could not find accommodation in the Princeton or Tulameen hotels. The first tournament proved to be a great success. The Hon. W. A. MacKenzie, Minister of Mines, opened the proceedings. On the first day A. Sneles of Hollyburn Club, won the 12 mile race in 1 hour and 3 1-4 minutes.

By the time I got to the hill on the day of the jumping it was nearly 2 o'clock, so I knew that I would not have long to wait if the jumping started on time. It did. Soon after 2 o'clock came the call "Look out below!" In a moment all was hushed, and in that hush of expectation I saw Nels Nelson, world-champion of a former year, high up on the sky-line. He was at the top of the extension. In a second he was off, then out from the take-off and through the air, landing on the hill somewhere halfway down. He made a beautiful curve through the air and landed splendidly on the hill, and shot out from the foot. It was his first jump on "Our Hill". Jumpers from Revelstoke, Burns Lake, Vancouver, Copper Mountain and Princeton all took part. In all, 15 jumpers made

60 jumps. There were less than half a dozen spills. No one was hurt. The weather man was on our side, and everything went smoothly as clockwork. Len Howson of Pen-ticton was manager for the day, and everything went "according to plan". From the minute of the first jump there was no waiting. The crowd of spectators was estimated at between 800 and 900. The longest jump was made by R. Lymbourn of Revelstoke: 168 feet, coming from the top of the scaffold. He made four feet better than his tutor, Nels Nelson, whose jump of 164 feet was equalled by that of our own Ivar Knudsen.

The Darcy Mountain road was crowded with traffic that day, and I noted Bert Irwin with a truck load of kids making for the hill. This item is worthy of a place in our records for no one has worked more consistently in the interests of skiing among the juniors than Bert Irwin, the organizer of the Amber Ski Club, about which we shall have more to say later on. At 7 p.m. on the night of the jumping tournament there was a banquet for the skiers in the Tulameen Hotel, and Nels Nelson told me that he originally intended to be a sky-pilot rather than a ski-pilot.

The history of subsequent tournaments will be told more briefly, but this first one includes the story of beginnings, and deserves longer notice. Such success as attended it was not the result of good luck, but of hard work and careful planning.

The following letter from the Hon. W. A. McKenzie, Minister of Mines in 1930, is evidence of the interest he took in the Club. The cup

which he donated was a prized trophy. The letter is addressed to Mr. A. Stenvold and Mr. Oscar Carson, and dated "Office of the Minister ((of Mines)), Victoria, December 19th, 1930," and reads as follows:

"I appreciate the courtesy you extended me in proposing to elect me your Honorary President and I wish to assure you that it will give me great pleasure to accept this office from your Club. At the present moment I am unable to say whether or not I may be in Princeton while your Championship Competitions are being held on January 28th and 29th next. However, in any case, you have my best wishes for a successful and interesting meet. —Yours very truly, W. A. McKenzie, Minister of Mines."

A note in the Princeton STAR for Thursday, 1st January, 1931, tells that Copper Mountain has a good hill. "Little but game" was the comment of Ivar Knudsen last Sunday after making the first jump on Copper Mountain hill. Jumps of 100 and 115 feet. The new Club at Copper Mountain has 42 members. . .

The B. C. championships were held in Princeton in 1931, Wednesday and Thursday, January 28 and 29. Minnie Engen was Captain and Hill Manager and Judges were A. Grimsgaard assisted by E. Engen and A. Stenvold. Weather conditions could not have been worse for the event. The most marvellous thing about the tournament was that it was held in spite of adverse weather conditions. Snow had to

be packed on to the road for the race, and on the hill for the jump. Johnny Carlson said that when he saw the hill on Thursday morning he almost wept—it was so wet and slushy, and the bare spots were so prominent. But with willing helpers it was possible to make it comparatively safe for jumping. Tommy Tapping of Revelstoke fractured an ankle. A. Snelg of Princeton captured the race. Nels Jorstad of Winnipeg carried off the combined championship of B. C., in the first of the western meets to be held in Princeton, with 384 points to Kaldahl's 282.4; and Pete Sandness's 262.1. Jorstad won the Grand Cup for Class A. Combined; Nordall Kaldahl, Hollyburn, the style jumping trophy; and Nip Stone, Grouse Mountain, the longest standing jump event. The tournament had been broadcast over Spokane, Wenatchee and Vancouver stations. It had already affiliated with the Western branch of the Canadian Amateur Ski Association. Chief Grimsgaard commenced the work done by the local club in spite of weather conditions. Financially, too it was a success; \$249.00 being taken at the hill, and \$260.00 at the dance.

The weather man helped to make the 1932 tournament an unqualified success. (Thursday and Friday, January 28 and 29). The hill was in good shape. No records were approached, far less broken, but a local record of 197 ft. was made by H. Wahn of Portland in a trial jump. The mark of H. Belsvik, 198 feet, made earlier in the month, was marred by a fall. Belsvik had the satisfaction of making the

longest standing jump in the competition, 189 feet. Over 1,000 people were present, including young people, who did not pay for admission. Gate receipts were \$490.00.

Albert Johnson of Vancouver secured major honours in the 1933 event with 200 points in racing, and 116.75 in jumping. Nordal Kaldahl jumped 175 feet. Tom Mobraaten equalled this distance but fell. Miss Daisy Bourdon of Vancouver, secretary of the C. A. S. C. Western Branch, visited, and made many friends. She presented the prizes at the dance following the tournament.

Snow-bound roads officially cancelled the 1934 New Year's Day Ski Jump, but jumps were held unofficially. Ivar Knudsen and Ole Johannsen both made jumps of 135 feet. The Irwin boys made 85 feet on the B. hill. On Monday, January 8th, 1934, Dr. J. R. Naden broke his leg while skiing. Cold spoiled the annual event which was held the following month. Henry Sotveit made 175 feet. Bobby Lymbourn of Revelstoke equalled this mark, though he had injured his ankle. Good jumps were made by Belsvik and Mobraaten. Ole Johannsen won the 12 mile race in 1935 (February 14) in 55 minutes, 18 seconds. The hill was glassy with ice, making jumping dangerous. Hjalmar Hvam of Portland made 174 feet but fell. On Friday, 18th, January, 1935, the thermometer recorded -38 degrees, and the following week there occurred the greatest snowfall yet recorded in the valley—nearly six feet. In 1936, too, weather conditions created difficulties for the tournament.

and it was dangerous to attempt any records. Nels Nelson, as President of the Western branch of the C. A. S. C., was present.

The outstanding event in recent years was the holding of the Western Canadian Championship. The minutes under date 16th, April, 1937 record that "It was moved by E. Anderson and seconded by F. Green that the Club apply for the 1938 Western Canada Championship as suggested in a letter from the Vancouver Ski Zone Committee, and that the club put on four events:— jumping, cross-country race, down-hill race and slalom — carried."

"A discussion followed concerning a slalom and down-hill course. The opinion of the meeting was that a "down-hill course" could be made of approximately 12 mile length, with a drop of 1,200 feet, near the ski-hill, and that a slalom course could be constructed adjoining the hill. . . ."

The following report has reference to the 1938 Tournament and appeared in the **Canadian Ski Year Book**, 1938, p. 172:

"Instead of dating everything from the "Big Snow," we in Princeton probably will in future date events from the year of the Big Tournament. We had the pleasure last winter of staging the Western Canadian Championships. . .

" . . . Princeton Club would like to take this occasion to say its hat is off to the Vancouver men, who, as Zone officials put the tournament over. Fellows like Jack Hutchins n. Fred Hudson, Chris Engh and Rolf Dokka are real guys. The

writer, who once upon a time was a club official and knows some of the heartbraks of putting on a tournament, would like too, on behalf of the Club, to say a big "Thank You" to its own secretary, Roy Thorstenson. Roy is the kind of secretary who undertakes to do six men's work and thinks he has fallen down on the job when he manages to do five men's

"Our big hill is one we are proud of, as witnessed by the two exhibition jumps, following the competition of over 200 feet, made by Tom Mobraaten, Western Champion, and Johnny Leed, of nearby Copper Mountain. . . ."

This sets the unofficial record of the hill as "over 200 feet."

The foregoing has provided a running commentary on skiing in Similkameen. The concluding part of this paper will deal with the following items in the order in which they are set down— Club officers, members, the hill, the chalet, the Ladies' Ski Club, the Amber Ski Club, the Copper Mountain Ski Club, Princeton Skiers abroad, and the future of skiing in Similkameen.

The club has been fortunate in securing men of wisdom and tact to guide its destiny. The first Honorary President was J. A. Brown, and he was followed by the member for Parliament, Hon. W. A. McKenzie, and C. Tupper. The following have occupied the Presidential chair: (date given is year of election to office)—A. Stenvold, 1929; E. Engen, 1930; Ivar Knudsen 1931; C. R. Watson, 1932; A. O.

enthusiasts. The club, however, was not organized until the fall of 1930, when 50 members joined, and Andrew Andersen was made President; Tim Waterland, vice-President; Ted Mahon, secretary-treasurer. In November, 1930, mining operations closed down, but the club continued to thrive. The big hill at Voight's Camp, two miles north of Copper Mountain, was put in shape in 1930. It has been improved from time to time. Jumps of 200 feet are now possible, and the hill is believed to be one of the best in the Province. Among the original workers on the hill were: Nels Seter, Dan Olstrom, Rolf Lagaard, Henry Julsrud, Nils Leed and his two sons Johnny and Olav.

H. Julsrud claims to have made the first jump in November 1929 on 6 feet of snow. Exhibition jumps were made New Year's day 1930 by Minnie Engen (114 feet); Ivar Knudsen (115 and 120 feet); and Ole Johannsen (102 and 110 feet). In the Tournament held in 1931 (January 18th and 19th) Nils Leed was first in jumping. The longest (unofficial) jumps have been made by Johnny Leed—194, standing, and 204 with a spill.

The club was reorganized in 1937, and at the tournament which followed (1938) Johnny Leed was first in the jumping. H. Julsrud is one of the moving spirits of the club. A junior tournament was held in 1940 on January 14; and the Similkameen Championships in 1940 on January 27th and 28th. A little hill has been completed within the bounds of the camp, and the slopes on the golf course have become favourite skiing grounds. Mountain

skiers have made good progress elsewhere.

No record of skiing in this valley would be complete without some reference to the part local skiers have played in B. C. and across the line. To list the honours they have achieved would fill a column. Sufficient to say that they have worthily represented Similkameen.

Future— When one thinks of winter sports and the future, the dreams of the early Princeton enthusiasts seem likely to be realized. The Similkameen Valley may yet be the playground of the whole Province. Skiing has taken its place as the premier winter sport in the valley. Its growth in the last decade has been amazing. The exploits of Finnish skiers in their war of preservation has captured the imagination, and given an added impetus to skiing in Canada. Skiing is part of the heritage that Scandinavia has brought to Canada. In years to come skiing will have lost none of its thrill, and we may look to the future with confidence. The hopes and dreams of the pioneers will be amply justified by those who come after us.

—J. C. Goodfellow