

The Art of the Unexpected

In a career that stretched three decades, Murray Hay became one of North America's most prolific trail-map illustrators. **BY LORI KNOWLES**



Above: Canadian ski-map artist Murray Hay prepares to take a charter flight near Quebec City in Canada, probably for an aerial survey of Le Massif or Mont Sainte-Anne. Left: Hay's first trail map, completed in 1976, depicted the Lake Louise ski area in Alberta.

ALL IMAGES COURTESY HAY FAMILY

They're the *Where's Waldo* illustrations of Canadian skiing. The late Murray Hay's hand-painted trail maps of the late 20th century are as detailed and witty as the red-and-white striped Waldo creations of British illustrator Martin Handford. Showcasing trails, bumps, boundaries and a trove of hidden humor, Hay's maps have guided skiers from Lake Louise to Tremblant, Alyeska, Sun Valley, Blackcomb and beyond.

Hay's introduction to skiing came in the mid-1970s by way of Alberta's Lake Louise Ski Area. The resort brass—Charlie Locke, Sir Rodney Touche—contacted the Calgary-based commercial artist, curious if he knew how to paint a trail map. "I had no idea," Hay told the *Calgary Sun* in 1991. "I didn't know what the hell skiing was!"

Hay quickly learned everything there was to learn about skiing...and then some. Signing on first with Lake Louise—and then later with resorts in Alberta, British Columbia, Idaho, Alaska and Japan—he helped to advance skiing's map-making process in the days before computer-aided design. In a career that stretched three decades from the 1970s to the 1990s, Hay joins Hal Shelton, Don Moss and James Niehues as North America's most prolific resort map illustrators. (For

a comprehensive article on the work of Shelton and Moss, see the December 2005 issue of *Skiing Heritage*.)

Today, Murray Hay's daughters—Allison and Lynda—describe their father's process as meticulous, painstaking and time-consuming. For each project the artist spent many uncomfortable hours on the edge of his comfort zone, strapped into a harness and leaning from the open door of a helicopter. With a Pentax camera in hand, he snapped photographs of ski area slopes, trees, lodges and topography. Back at his drawing board—a basement studio at home in Calgary—the artist pieced the images together into a panoramic view. Then, using old-school tools such as pencils and tracing paper, Hay traced trails, gullies, lifelines and trees. Resort staff made changes to these pencil sketches, adding a band of rock here, or a dip in elevation there. "He was always taking them back and forth for ski-area approval," Allison says. "For them he'd literally move mountains!"

Next, the artist would spend up to three months transforming his sketches into what daughter Allison calls "beautiful paintings"—acrylics on canvas rendered with care and a great deal of detail. "I remember coming home from school to find my dad in the basement with a teeny, tiny brush getting the shapes of the trees

or the exact point the sun was shining,” she says. “He’d paint moguls so you actually felt as though you were skiing on the map.” She adds: “His work would take hours and hours and hours, and sometimes he’d get bored. We’d hear him giggling in the basement and he’d say, ‘Girls, come here and look!’ He’d painted ski crashes or little tiny fights into the crowd scenes. They were hard to find unless you knew where to look. They were exquisite.”

In the final stages, the artist added trail names, chairlift routes and legends to a clear plastic overlay, then wrote his signature obscurely in a lower corner. To this day, skiers at Canadian resorts such as Sunshine Village and Lake Louise will peer at a trailmap on the side of a run and ask, “Is that a Murray Hay?”

Hay’s daughter Lynda describes her father as humble, hardworking and a “first flake skier.” Inspired at age 55 to learn to ski, she says he became a “mature” ski bum, clomping around in the house at the first sign of snow, getting used to new ski boots. Says Lynda:



Top photo: This map of Lake Louise shows the World Cup downhill course, with its start and upper sections faintly visible below the treeless summit. Bottom: The Lake Louise cross-country trail network. In the lower lefthand corner, you can see the frozen lake and the famous namesake Chateau.

“When I was 14 it was extremely annoying!”

Despite his age, Hay learned how to ski quickly, and he learned to ski *quickly*, often beating his daughters down the slopes he’d come to know through map-making. Through his work, Hay befriended Canadian ski greats such as World Cup skier Dave Irwin, Sunshine Village mountaineer John Gow, and of course, current Lake Louise Ski Area owner Charlie Locke. “He’d go to see Charlie on business,” Lynda says, “but the business would take about 10 minutes, then they’d go ski for the day. He loved it. He made great buddies in the ski industry.”

Canadian skiers have always loved Murray Hay, too. The artist’s reputation for detail has lived on in many a ski household. “I can’t count how many times people tell me they were lost at a ski area but found their way because they had one of my father’s ski maps,” Allison says. “They’ll say to me, ‘I’ve got a Murray Hay in my pocket!’”

When asked how they would classify Murray Hay as an artist, his daughters don’t hesitate to describe him as a realist. “In his work there was nothing left to chance,” Allison says. “The scenery, the nature, the landscape...it was all extremely realistic. Yet it always had an element of surprise—something interesting that you had to look for.”

Which brings us back to the *Where’s Waldo* concept. The next time you’re given a chance, look more closely at a Murray Hay ski map. You may see hidden tracks in the snow, dueling skiers in a liftline, or footsteps trailing down a mountain. They won’t be painted with red-and-white stripes like Waldo, but the humor’s the same and it’s just as unexpected. ❄️

Lori Knowles is a Canadian skier, writer and Editor-in-Chief of SNOW Magazine.

Hay created his maps by taking aerial photographs and then using tracing paper to add trails and lifts. This map depicts Panorama Mountain Resort in British Columbia.



MURRAY HAY ORIGINALS

A Murray Hay original will be auctioned in Spring 2018 at a Calgary fundraising gala benefitting the Calgary Association of Disabled Skiing (cadsocalgary.ca). Several more Murray Hay originals may soon go to private sale. For information, follow the Facebook page www.facebook.com/Murrayhay skimaps or contact Allison Hay by email (Allison.Hay@td.com) or phone (403.216.2046).