

**Bill Irwin**

Inducted CSHF: 2000
 Hometown: Princeton BC / Thunder Bay ON / Vernon BC
 Date of Birth: March 24, 1920
 Affiliated Discipline(s): Jumping, Nordic, Builder
 Active Career Date(s): 1937 - 1955
 FIS Code: n/a
 Club: Amber Ski Club, Loch Lomond Ski Club

At the time of his induction into the Canadian Ski Hall of Fame in 2000 at the age of 80, William "Bill" Irwin had been involved in skiing for over 71-years. The name Irwin is synonymous with Canadian skiing with no fewer than 7-family members involved on National teams at various times, including his son, Dave, one of the legendary National Team Members known as "The Crazy Canucks".

He inherited his love of skiing from his father, Bert, who managed the Amber Ski Club, Princeton, British Columbia and built Canada's first cable-handle rope tow at Amber in 1934, putting notches into short pieces of hockey sticks for the skiers to use as handles to grip the cable. Bill Irwin's exceptional racing career - he is generally regarded as one of Canada's greatest skiers in the 30s and 40s - began when he won the first race he entered, the "Potato Race" at Amber in 1930. He also won the last race he entered, the "Over the Hill Downhill" at Silver Star resort, Vernon, British Columbia at 63 years of age.

His involvement in the sport went far beyond his racing career. After World War II, in which he served as an instructor teaching Scottish Commandos how to ski, he moved to Thunder Bay (formerly Port Arthur/Fort William) in 1949. He quickly saw the potential of the Norwesters mountain range which surrounded the area. Unfortunately, his dream could not be realised as, in the short term, no financing was available. But he persisted and with no financial support, he carved out the Loch Lomond Ski Area, which opened with 5-homemade T-bar lifts on March 17th, 1956. It was a remarkable achievement. In 1975 he was given an Ontario Tourism Award for "...dedication to the tourist industry of Ontario through the development and promotion of skiing". When he sold the resort 23 years later, in 1979, he was honoured at a banquet at which it was said, "You certainly put skiing on the map in Thunder Bay".

He followed his father Bert's example at Amber by encouraging young people into the racing program and holding many races throughout the district. Loch Lomond became a well-known source of Alpine skiing talent. Besides his three sons, Dan, Doug and David, all members of the Canadian National Team, the area fostered such names as John Ritchie, Lyn MacIntosh and Terry Spence who became National Team coaches. Other skiing talent included Judy Young, Peter Spence, Bev Chambers, Bill French and George and Sally Hunt.

Racing Record Highlights

With the exception of the years 1943 to 1945 when he was serving in the Canadian Army, Bill Irwin's racing record from 1937 to 1955 is one of exceptional accomplishments. He was awarded over 200 trophies in both Nordic and Alpine disciplines including Slalom, Downhill, Combined Events, Jumping and Cross-Country. He won 12 of 16 Dominion of Canada races, 42 Divisional Championships, 11 U.S. and International Championships and numerous zone races and championships. Some examples:

1937, 1939, 1941, 1942 1st places finishes in the Western Canadian Championships, Downhill, Slalom, Combined, Cross-Country, Jumping.

1940, 1941, 1942 1st place finishes, Vancouver Ski Classic

1947 It was a measure of his versatility he was named to the Canadian Olympic team for the 1948 Winter Games, St Moritz, Switzerland, in 6-events. In Nordic events, Cross-Country, Jumping and Nordic Combined, in Alpine events, Slalom, Giant Slalom and Downhill. At the Olympic Games in the following year, Bill Irwin was skiing on a pair of former US army skis which he had bought for \$10.00 and, in his own words, "That's what I raced on in both cross-country and slalom. I put them in a press and put a little hook on the tip, then moved the bindings ahead a bit. That gave them more bite and I needed more bite to ski with the other guys and their new skis. I was the only one to wear safety bindings at the Olympics. A friend of mine, Hjalmar Hvam in Oregon, had invented the binding after he broke a leg while skiing one year and then the other leg the next year. It was just two little prongs in the toe. I used them in ski jumping and nordic combined, the slalom and giant slalom. They looked so flimsy and no one else used them, but one of our jumpers broke a leg and another in the downhill" (The Chronicle Journal, Thunder Bay, Ontario, November 16, 2000)

1947 3-Medals at the Laurentian Zone Championships, Canadian Ski Association and 2-Medals in the Quebec Kandahar races

1949 1st place finish, Senior Combined event, Nordic Combined event, Mount McKay, Fort William, Ontario.

1950 1st place finishes in Slalom, Downhill, and Cross-Country, 2nd place finish in Jumping at the first Central Canadian Ski Championships

1951, 1952, 1953 1st place finishes in Downhill, Slalom and Combined events, Central Canadian Ski Championships, Port Arthur, Ontario

1952 1st place finish, Lake Superior Ski Zone Championships

1953 1st place finishes in Slalom, and Combined events, Central United States Championships, Grand Marais, Minnesota

1954 1st place finish in Downhill and Combined events, Central Canadian Ski Championships

1955 1st place finishes in Downhill, Slalom and Combined events, Lake Superior, Ski Zone Championships