

Arriving safely at the cabin we put away our skis until the next week-end. After enjoying a mug of Oscar Pearson's famous coffee we gather our belongings and light our bugs (old cans with holes punched in the bottoms in which we stick our candles), groups of which, like fireflies, are soon twinkling down the trail.

A short trip on the ferry takes us back to Vancouver and to the duties of everyday life, which we attack with fervor, feeling very fit after our healthy, invigorating week-end trip.

CLARKE W. HOFFMAN.

PIONEER DAYS OF SKI-ING IN WESTERN CANADA

By RUDOLPH J. VERNE

THE EARLY mining booms of British Columbia are surrounded by a colorful romantic glamour of which stalwart pioneers give graphic accounts, if they are in the right mood and you refer to some little incident that happened in days gone by when men were men with hobnail boots and sinews of steel.

On a beautiful winter day back in 1913 we ran across the king of them all, Olav Gjeldnes; he was a grand old man whom you could not help taking a real liking to and admire. He had come all the way from Rossland, that picturesque mountain top mining town, to take in the thrills of a Revelstoke ski meet. He was sorry that the sport of the modern Vikings had faded away in his home town where it once was the centre of attraction at the historically famous old Rossland Winter Carnivals.

But he liked Revelstoke all right, and the big hill seemed just to catch his fancy. If we remember right, he was one of the judges. Among the many competitors was another well-known figure in ski circles, J. Engen from Penticton. He was an exponent of the old style and created a great sensation among the many spectators as he made his landing in the telemark position and holding it to the end of the runway. When the other judges, to whom this was something new, seemed somewhat undecided about giving him full points for style, Mr. Gjeldnes strongly contended that there was no docking to be made.

Messrs. Gjeldnes and Engen became the most popular men in this ski-loving little railroad town, for Revelstoke had put heart and soul in the sport and therefore fully appreciated these two ski pioneers. Gjeldnes, who had made and lost fortunes in mining at Rossland, was the originator and backer of the far-famed Rossland Winter Carnivals; Engen, the first to introduce ski-ing to the American Continent. So to him may be attributed the honour of being the father of ski-ing in the New World.

In those days the elite of ski riders was represented by Anders Haugen, Lars Haugen, Carl Hall, Henry Hall, "Daredevil" Hansen, Sigfried Steinwall, and last but not least, the idol of the West, our own Nels Nelsen. Revelstoke justly claims the honour of being the birthplace of competitive ski-ing in the West and has been holding its leading position ever since 1914. Its magnificent hill has been developed till it at last reached such proportions that 200 feet jumps were looked upon as commonplace and from the point of projection no hill in the world can compete with it. If you are fortunate enough to be able to take in their great ski tournament, you will be heartily welcomed. Dave Orr, the energetic Club secretary, Drennan Holten, the popular president, and Nels Nelsen, the famous Club captain, with a great bunch of followers, will meet the visiting skiers at the train, put you up at the best hotel in town and make you feel right at home.

Next February, the Revelstoke Ski Club will hold the most important meet in Western Canada, the Championship of the West, and it is hoped that our Eastern Ski Clubs will endeavour to send their best skiers West in return for the several occasions the West has been represented in the East.

With the inauguration of the Banff Winter Carnival, ski-ing was introduced into Banff by skiers from Camrose, Revelstoke and the experts from the United States. With the original ski slide situated on a mountain slope, which necessitated a forced spill at the bottom of the course, conditions were far from ideal. But the ski riders of those days were not particular and gamely risked their lives and limbs trusting that nothing would happen to them and that it would all be for the best of the sport. However, the Banff people were soon looking for a location for a new ski hill which they found on Tunnel Mountain. This hill has been improved repeatedly and last year was a first class jump, although snow conditions were not altogether satisfactory, and this is a condition where even the best interest and intent are of no avail. Fully realizing that the lack of snow is their greatest obstacle, arrangements had been made to build a ski hill on a high level plateau a couple of thousand feet above the altitude of Banff proper, near the Stony Squaw Mountain. This will be very interesting for the skiers that will congregate at the next Banff Winter Carnival, usually held during the first or second week in February. Easy access by means of sleighs up a graded road makes the new location an ideal one, with ample snow and wonderful views.

The next place in the West to join the ski ranks was Calgary, where a few enthusiasts started a ski club and built a small hill some fourteen years ago on a river bank in Elbow Park on the outskirts of the city. When it was ready thousands of the city folks pilgrimaged out to inspect it.

A bunch of skiers, including all the great names, came down from Banff "at their own expense" as real amateurs to help the local ski boys put the sport over. Calgary as a real sportstown was right behind the movement, "no matter what would happen," as they said in the city hall when permission was obtained and a guarantee signed that the city was not to be liable for any accidents in connection with the exhibition sponsored by the "Suicide Club," as the local humorists named the new ski organization. In addition, all the twenty-two ski riders were introduced the day before the competition to the 8,000 hockey fans that gathered in the Victoria Arena to witness the title hockey match.

With the curiosity thus worked up to a climax, the crowds attending the Tournament next day were so great that the whole mounted police force in the district was commandeered to take charge and maintain discipline. About one third of the city's entire population had found its way out to the ski hill and in addition many hundreds of people from the neighbouring districts. The Sarcee Indian Reserve's aboriginals were out in force enjoying the jamboree immensely.

When Anders Haugen opened the contest, a bunch of cowboys yelled encouragingly "Ride him cowboy, ride him," an old Indian chief and master of many old-time ceremonies remarked that it took more than an ordinary cowboy to ride those "wooden bronchos." One after one the skiers performed, not a single fall being recorded. As the snow was melting fast, the last few jumpers had to grease their skis with liquid soap held in readiness by a Chicago jumper who claimed he had used it with success in summer time at a windy city fair. It seemed to work fine on the bare boards of the scaffold but not quite so good down below where there was still enough real snow to splash on the spectators at the end of the run. Nelsen, Haugen, Steinwall, and others, received ovations from the multitude of spectators.

This historical meet was such a huge success that the old hillsite was abandoned and a new one selected—on the roof of the exhibition grandstand! The steel structure was ordered from a bridge company in Winnipeg and cost something like two thousand dollars in freight alone. The architects had made some changes of their own from the original drawing, with the result

that when in place the hill looked like an elevator shaft with its almost perpendicular chute. It became the outstanding landmark of the prairie town and could be seen at a greater distance than the Eiffel Tower of Paris. This time the Calgary Industrial Exhibition Association sponsored the meet in the form of Calgary's First Winter Carnival, in the year 1921. The underlying idea was to get the spectators within the Exhibition gates so that the financial end of the enterprise would be assured. But the poor ski jumpers took fits when they spied the derrick that looked like a high diving tower, some 200 feet above the ground. After papers had been signed at the City Hall to the effect "that the ski-jumpers took their lives in their own hands, and that the city was in no way responsible for any accident" the skiers prepared for the worst and decided to try it out. On the first day of the competition there was a dramatic wave in the crowd of 8,000 when Nels Nelsen's young brother Ivind crawled up the dizzy structure to open the competition. As it was almost a sheer drop down to the take-off, a rope had to be used for the skier to hang on to when about to leave the high platform. The tenseness of the moment was not lessened by the fact that a couple of ambulance trucks moved up to the enclosure as soon as the start was announced by the buglers. The crowd almost lost their breath when young Ivind came soaring down the steep incline making a death defying leap from the take-off of the grandstand roof to the ground below where the thousands roared their approval. The young ski rider came through unhurt, much to his own surprise, for the terrific jolt on the short take-off curve nearly upset all his control of balance. After this initial trial jump all the others went up for their turns. Even the two young White brothers from Banff showed amazing proof of strong nerves in tackling the dangerous chute in spite of their comparative inexperience.

The day was a great success and on the second day competition a still greater crowd greeted the daring performances. Several hair-raising spills failed to stop the skiers from trying again but "Daredevil" Hansen's "split" on the steep under-hill made the people regard the skiers as super-humans as far as nerve and toughness was concerned. Nelsen himself, the idol of the meet, suffered a stiff neck in a collision at the foot of the hill but managed to pick up enough to enjoy the good time that was had when it was all over.

Now this hill, the most unique and strangest ever conceived, exists no more, partly on account of lack of snow, but the interest in ski-ing has been carried on through the recently established co-operation with the Banff Ski Club.

Since those days of pioneer ski-ing in the West, this part of the Dominion has shown rapid development, especially through the forming of the Western Branch of the Canadian Amateur Ski Association. In this organization are now registered four clubs from British Columbia, two clubs from Alberta, while several more have signified their intention of joining. From Winnipeg comes good news of two new Clubs being organized—Winnipeg Ski Club and Norge Ski Club. In British Columbia the Vernon Ski Club has already proven itself by arranging some good competitions last season. We also have heard interesting news from Princeton, B.C., where an organization for ski-ing is said to boast some hundred and fifty members. A very special interest in the great outdoor sport has grown up in Vancouver where three clubs are affiliated with the Western Branch. In addition there is rumour of still another Club being formed, while the local well-known track and field organization, the Viking Athletic Club, has decided to add winter sport activities to its programme. The 1929-30 season thus promises to be a banner year in the history of ski-ing in the West, a full dozen clubs preparing for a busy season. With this wonderful development of ski-ing in the Western Provinces, it is only fair that the next Dominion Championship be awarded to one of our strong Western Clubs, especially since our Western Champion, Mr. J. Nordmoe of Camrose Ski Club, brought the Dominion Championship title West after his splendid feat of winning the Sir Henry Thornton trophy, emblematic of the all-round Amateur Ski Championship of Canada.



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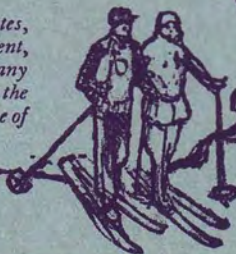
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