

Payette Lakes Ski Patrol History
Southern Idaho Region
Pacific Northwest Division
National Ski Patrol

Compiled during 2019-2020 Ski Season

Skiing activities began 3 miles west of McCall in 1938. The Payette Lakes Ski Patrol (PLSP) was created between 1951 and 1955, depending on who you talk to. This early day history of skiing in the McCall area gives a background to how the Payette Lakes Ski Patrol came into being.

The following narrative is according to long time PLSP member, Earl Dodds, who joined the PLSP in 1957 and stayed active with the PLSP through 2018: "I've got to say a few things about my early days on this mountain. This was strictly a community not-for-profit volunteer project and I got right with the program. Alf Engen, a skiing pioneer in America had visited McCall at the request of Warren Brown, McCall's Sugar Daddy when it came to skiing, particularly so if it was to help the little kids. Alf Engen selected the terrain at what is now known as the Little Ski Hill as being the most suitable for ski development in the McCall area partly due to accessibility of the site by means of the state highway that was regularly snow plowed."

In 1937 Warren Brown, owner of Brown Tie and Lumber (Brown Industries) built the The Ski Hill on Hwy 55 just west of McCall, Idaho. It was built as a diversion for local forest workers during the long snowy winters. Warren Brown wanted the Payette National Forest to get involved with the ski area, but he was told they could not do anything because the area that Alf Engen had selected was not on Forest Service ground. The community (probably Warren Brown) solved this problem by buying the 40 acre tract and giving it to the Forest Service.

The Ski Hill continued to grow and serve the local community. By having The Ski Hill on Forest Service land, it allowed a lodge to be built by Finnish Log Builders with help from the Civilian Conservation Corps men. The current lodge is the third lodge- the first 2 burned down. The Ski Hill continues to this day to be a T-bar serviced, 405' vertical drop ski area which includes night skiing.

To quote Earl: "during my first summer in McCall in 1949 as a Forest Service smokejumper, small crews were regularly sent to the ski hill to do work on the water system and other tasks while awaiting a fire call. This leaves one to wonder how accidents were handled in the period before the NSP came aboard and it partly explains why Ranger Wally Lancaster was so anxious for me to help him out by joining the National Ski Patrol."

With increased activity at the The Ski Hill came the need for more professionalism and organization for the group of people that were providing first aid and rescue services. The Payette Lakes Ski Patrol (PLSP) was formed in 1951/55 and became part of the National Ski Patrol System (NSP) that was started in 1938 by Minot (Minnie) Dole. Being part of the NSP gave the patrol standards to follow including Standard First Aid (18 hours), Advanced First Aid Course (10 hours), and Special Winter Rescue (10 hours).

In 1957 Earl Dodds had just come back to McCall for the winter. Earl was a Ranger for the Big Creek District. The Payette Forest Supervisor called Earl to his office. Earl was trying to think of anything that he could have done that would require a meeting with the Supervisor. When Earl arrived he was told that he needed to go out to The Ski Hill to help out and that started his relationship with the Payette Lakes Ski Patrol. This continues today.

The Ski Hill helped grow the youth ski racing, ski jumping, cross country racing and after school programs. The Payette Lakes Ski Club has produced at least seven winter Olympians over the years. Locals talked of developing a steeper, longer, and bigger ski area for West Central Idaho, which led to opening Brundage Mountain Ski Area November 23, 1961. After Brundage opened The Ski Hill became known as the Little Ski Hill.

Brundage was a joint venture of Brown Industries and J.R. Simplot Company for many years and currently is solely owned by Brown Industries. Brundage Mountain Resort is mostly on Payette National Forest land and operates under a special use permit. The PLSP expanded to patrol both areas. Over the years, Brundage has been very supportive of the PLSP for the services the Patrol has provided. Brown Industries led by Judd DeBoer, Warren Brown's son-in-law, received a NSP Distinguished Service Award in 2019 for his many years of service to the ski industry and the NSP.

Brundage Mountain Resort has grown over the years adding new chairs and more skiing area, along with the Cat Skiing Program (permitted for 18,000 acres), snowmobile rentals and tours, and snowshoe rentals and trails. In 1961 Brundage opened with a mile long fixed-grip double chairlift with a 1600' vertical drop, a T-Bar, and a Rope Tow. In 1976 a parallel double chairlift was added alongside Chair One. In 1990 (the year of Idaho Centennial) the Centennial Lift, a triple chairlift, was added to the southern edge of the terrain, which increased the area's terrain by 30% and added 200' of vertical drop, by lowering the base. In 1994 Easy Street, a new beginner's area, and the lower parking lot were added. In 1997 the parallel double chairlifts were replaced by the high-speed detachable quad, the Bluebird Express. This chair cut the ride time to the top in half. In 2007 Brundage invested in two fixed-grip triple chairlifts: Lakeview and Bear. Lakeview lift opened up another 160 acres of Payette Lakes/McCall-facing terrain.

In the early years, the Patrol Room at the Little Hill consisted of a closet/storage room

next to the fireplace. At Brundage the Patrol Room/First Aid Room was a former ticket "shack": one room on moveable skids with 2 cots, lights and heat, but no water.

According to a 1976 Roster, PLSP had 31 volunteers available for scheduling. Each week there were 5 assignments at the Little Ski Hill with 2 patrollers per assignment (10 patrollers). At Brundage there were 2 assignments per week with 6 patrollers per day (12 patrollers). Beyond that commitment the PLSP scheduled patrollers for all holidays (Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's, President's Day and Easter). The volunteers also performed the Hill Captain duties on the weekends and holidays. This required the 31 volunteers to work approximately 24-25 scheduled duty days. Training and instruction were additional commitments. The monthly meetings were mandatory.

In those days, 6 patrollers were covering the mountain without radios, cell phones or snowmobiles. At that time, when a patroller got off the top of the lift, the lift operator would say that there was an accident and give a location. Several patrollers and several toboggans might show up at the scene. A lot of toboggan runs were made in those days.

The PLSP has continued to serve the two areas with patrollers that are very proud of the level of care that they give to the injured people that need help. PLSP has a large cadre of skilled instructors in all the disciplines that work to keep everyone current during the annual refreshers and new candidate training.

Annually since 2016 Patroller Jimmy Bryan and his team of builders have created impressive larger than life "top of the mountain" snow sculptures for McCall's Winter Carnival. These have created a great deal of pride among Patrollers and community recognition for the PLSP.

PLSP members have also served the NSP beyond the Patrol level in Regional, Divisional and National positions. These include National Board Representatives, Pacific Northwest Division Directors and Advisors and numerous Southern Idaho Region positions.

Payette Lakes Ski Patrol Anecdotes

Brundage Mountain's First Ski Race: by Earl Dodds

One skiing event that needs to be recorded before it is completely lost is the first ski race held at Brundage Mountain in the spring of 1961.

The community of McCall had long hosted one PNWSRA sanctioned race each ski season on what is now known as the Little Ski Hill. This race was called the American

Legion Ski Race and was usually held on the weekend near the first of April, about the end of the ski season.

All the paper work connected with the permitting of a new ski development on the Payette National Forest had been completed over the winter and what was soon to become the Brundage Mountain Company was cleared to begin construction starting in the summer of 1961. But, of course, on the first of April there was way too much snow on the mountain to do much in the manner of ski resort construction.

Warren Brown was the chief guru behind skiing in the McCall community and was the push for a larger, more challenging ski area. He decided, as sort of a publicity stunt, to hold the American Legion Ski Race on Brundage rather than the Little Ski Hill. When Warren decided to do something, no matter how difficult it might be, it usually got done.

So that's what we did! No ski lift, no lodge or warming hut, no recognizable ski runs, no ski patrol facilities – nothing but a big raw mountain that had only been skied by a few ski pioneers who were scouting out possibilities for resort development, and who were the forerunners to our being there.

Just getting enough people to the top of the mountain where the race was to be held (as I remember things, near the top of our present Main Street ski run) was no easy task. Warren came up with the loan of a couple of WWII surplus over-the-snow "Weasels" that were rigged with ropes to tow skiers the 8-10 miles from Highway 55 to the race course.

I was one of two ski patrollers that day. I believe that Wally Lancaster was the other patroller. We brought a toboggan from the Little Hill along that we didn't have to use – thank goodness – as neither one of us had ever handled a rescue sled on a big mountain before.

I really don't remember much about the actual race, like who won, but Bert Armstrong, who still is a regular skier on Brundage was one of the racers. He and I talk about the race every once in awhile, and shake our heads over the current state of development on the mountain – 5 chair lifts, probably the most trouble-free access road of any resort in the Northwest, and greatly increased skier visits. Brundage has come a long way and the Payette Lakes Ski Patrol has been in lockstep with resort expansion every step of the way.

The Hitt Mountain Boys by Dale Luther

Hitt Mountain Ski Area, 17 miles west of Cambridge, Idaho, did not operate during the 1976-77 ski season due to financial problems. Five of the Hitt Mountain patrollers

asked Payette Lakes Ski Patrol if they could patrol with them to keep active. Four were current patrollers and one was a candidate. The PLSP was quite happy for the help as their numbers were somewhat down. With 10 Little Hill and 12 Brundage assignments per week, the added patrollers would be helpful with the number of scheduled duty days per patroller. At that time patrollers were scheduled around 25 days per season – weekends and holidays only. Earl Dodds stated that along with the patrollers, the Hitt Mountain boys brought along a toboggan. Brundage Mountain was somewhat “toboggan” poor, Earl remembered.

The only downside was that this toboggan had been donated to Hitt Mountain by Ore-Ida Foods in Ontario, Oregon and we didn't want J.R. Simplot to see an Ore-Ida branded sled on a Simplot mountain. I remember being in the Lodge when J.R. came in for lunch and while at the counter, J.R. watched the cook dump a bag of Ore-Ida French fries into the deep fryer. “What the hell is that?” J.R. questioned in a loud voice. The cook was taken back and kind of confused and then J.R. stated “there will not be Ore-Ida French fries on a Simplot mountain.” I'm sure the cook had no idea whose French fries the food service company supplied before that day, but I'm betting that after that, Simplot fries were special ordered!

J.R. Simplot, being a co-owner of Brundage and known to have a strong personality (to say the least), loved to ski and when he showed up and was ready to go, he didn't worry about whether the lift was open. He would just get on the lift and head to the top. I remember numerous times getting a call from management stating that “J.R. is on the mountain and the Ski Patrol needs to get loaded up...Now!”

Another patroller recalled that in JR's later years, he would show up at the mountain, get out of his rig, leave it running and head for the lift. At that time we had parking lot attendants who would park the vehicle for him. Another story was when Larry Shake would get on the radio and let us know that the lift was going to keep running until 5 pm. The rumor was that JR wasn't done skiing yet.