

New Exhibit Depicts Skiing in Mt Washington Valley

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Franconia Notch, NH – The history of skiing in New Hampshire's Mount Washington Valley is the subject of a new traveling photographic exhibit unveiled recently by the New England Ski Museum. The display is located in the new Intervale Rest Area on Routes 16 and 302 several miles north of North Conway village, where there is a sweeping view of Mount Washington over the alluvial plain of the Saco River.

The skiing history of the region is rich, and it can be argued that Jackson and North Conway were the first towns in the US where a ski business arose. Beginning in 1936, professional ski instruction and a pioneering ski tow were available in Jackson, and with the opening of a comprehensive resort at Mount Cranmore in 1938, it became the first mechanized American ski area located in a populated village, a combination that favored further ski industry developments.

The exhibit begins with a grainy image of three female skiers taken at the Eagle Mountain House in Jackson in 1887, and concludes with a photograph dating from the early 1970s of cross-country skiers in the same location. In the intervening years several unique contributions to skiing originated in the Eastern Slope Region, as the area was known in the decades before the 1960s. The first overhead cable ski tow of original design in the country was installed at what is now Black Mountain in the winter of 1936; the first (and with one exception, the only) Skimobile lift came to Cranmore in 1938; the first systematic ski area grooming in the country was performed at Cranmore in the early 1940s; and the first state ski lift safety board was chaired by Phil Robertson, a North Conway man.

Two further unique features of the area's ski history are the residence of master ski teacher Hannes Schneider beginning in 1939, and the looming presence of Mount Washington's Tuckerman Ravine, a natural snow collector where skiers can find snow well into the springtime. Schneider, who devised a system of ski technique and instruction in Austria and was considered by many to be the father of modern skiing, relocated to North Conway prior to World War II after being forced out of his native land by political turmoil. It was one of Schneider's Austrian protégés, Toni Matt, who captured the imagination of the skiing world when he schussed (ran straight) the Headwall of Tuckerman Ravine in 1939. The steep slopes and precipitous gullies of Tuckerman were not all skied until the early 1950s, when Brooks Dodge of Jackson made a concerted effort to descend them all.

All these moments and more are highlighted in the museum's Intervale exhibit, which will remain in place for the duration of the winter. The Museum also maintains a satellite exhibit in the base lodge at Bretton Woods Ski Area, where a display on the National Ski Patrol can be seen this winter. Within the next few weeks, the Museum will also open a satellite exhibit in downtown North Conway at the Shops at Norcross Place, which fittingly was once the Carroll Reed Ski Shop, founded by Carroll Reed, the man who first brought ski instruction to Jackson in 1936.

About the New England Ski Museum

Located in Franconia Notch next to the Cannon Mountain Tramway, NH, the New England Ski Museum is a non-profit, member-supported museum dedicated to collecting, preserving and exhibiting aspects of ski history. The Museum is open from 10 AM to 5 PM seven days a week from Memorial Day through the end of March. Admission is free. For more information call 800-639-4181 or visit www.skimuseum.org.