

Grouse Mountain and Skiing

I no longer remember how I came to take up skiing. I recall my first pair of skis, a Christmas gift from my mother: ash skis and bamboo poles. The skis I think cost \$4 and at the time, for her that was a lot of money. Add the cost of poles and boots and cable bindings, she must have spent \$30 on the two of us.

Because Larry Bruin, a friend of my brother's, skied on Grouse, so did we. We never skied on Hollyburn or Seymour. Weekends initially were probably overnight Saturday, staying with Larry's friend, Eric Laurillard, who had a cabin on Grouse and the Two Skiers shop on Cambie Street near Woodward's. Eric lived with Jessie. This was a time when shacking up was not socially acceptable. My memory of the cabin was that it was always crowded and noisy. How we got breakfast I don't know. I hope Jessie didn't have to cook for all of us. The cabin was in the ski village close to what is now the wide cleared slope running down from the chalet. The war must have been under way by the time we got our skis for if not, the following year after we got skis, then by 1941 my brother and his friends began to build a lumber cabin. There were no logs in the area by this time. I had little part in the building. I doubt that I could drive a nail without bending it. I must have helped to carry boards from the Grouse highway a half hour carry away. I did on one or two occasions join my brother on a shipyard workday to work on the cabin. He worked at the Burrard Dry-dock at the foot of Lonsdale as a welder and I worked on the riveting crew and later on as what was called a fitter's helper. How we escaped work I don't know. Probably someone's absence made our departure unnoticeable. One checked in at the Lonsdale entrance and then walked out a side entrance that was used to go to a work building across the street. From there, by streetcar, up to the cabin site to work and then back down, entering by the side gate and checking out through the Lonsdale entrance.

I always believed that my brother built the cabin without much help from his partners, Briun and Bristow and others. It was an icebox in the winter. It was never insulated. The cabin was always dirty. Dishes were unwashed. Ashes were not removed from the stove. We couldn't have used it much.

We all entered military service by 1942 and 1943 and after the War, I doubt that anyone used the cabin. It probably collapsed and was used for fuel. Near it were a few log cabins that survived for many years after the War. One was owned by Curly. I never did know his name. He was bald. We had to pass his cabin on the way to ours. It was a favourite resort of black bears. In the summer as you got sight of the cabin, on 3 or 4 occasions there were canned goods with holes punctured in them and a broken window and shutters.

To ski on Grouse you took the North Vancouver ferry and then the Lonsdale streetcar to about 26th Street. Here there was a store and if you had a nickel you would buy candy. From there, uphill on Lonsdale and then west (one used to follow this road to get to the trail which began at the site of what later became the Grouse chair lift). The walk up to the cabin must have been about 90 minutes from the streetcar. On a few occasions in the non-snow season, two or three at most, we took a taxi up the Grouse Mountain Highway (the gravel road that is now closed to public use) and walked in on a trail that was at the ski village level.

I didn't like skiing. I went reluctantly and spent little time skiing. There was one rope tow or two on the big hill. This was above the chalet level. I probably didn't have the 25¢ or so it cost for the day. I don't think I ever went to the summit of the hill. The rope tow didn't go far, perhaps half way and I would have thought the descent too dangerous. I took no lessons. I had the use of a book with pictures and diagrams and comments that showed me what I was doing wrong. My brother and his friends skied well, I thought, and associated with the experts, some of whom taught or raced. I probably spent much time herring-boning uphill and snow-plowing down and watched ski jumping. I've now forgotten the names of the jumpers but

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one of the group of jumpers regularly remains in my memory because he fell almost every time he jumped and this was all through the ski season.

I don't know how I would get back from skiing to our cabin or Laurillard's. The trail down, after much use would be rutted or icy and fast. Sunday evening, somehow, we got back to the streetcar and home. I had survived another day of skiing. Then in 1942 I sprained an ankle and this delayed my departure for RCAF training a few months.

I have no happy memories of skiing before I left for RCAF training so I don't know now why I got skis and began skiing when the War ended. Probably the skiing was connected with the outdoors, the hikes above Horseshoe Bay and up Grouse.

When my brother and I began skiing we went up for the day. Initially, it must have been on a Saturday because on Sunday we went to church. We carried skis and poles on the streetcar and wore ski boots. Going up overnight, until we had a cabin meant carrying a sleeping bag. We travelled by night, lighting our way with a "bug" candle stuck through a hole cut in the side of a can, nail holes punched in the end for ventilation and a wire looped as a carrying handle. Flashlights were for the rich. Carbide lamps, rarely seen on the mountain, were also more costly than candles. Usually there was snow on the trail almost from where the trail started, if not at its start. Because of the distance of travel, we didn't drink beer or wine but whisky and until Henry and I began work at the shipyards, we wouldn't have fortified ourselves for a weekend with Whisky. What would it have cost?, \$1.25 for a mickey, 13 ozs, and \$2.50 for 26ozs; but my early memories of Grouse evenings are of drinking whisky and loud voices. Music was usually provided by a gramophone, 78 RPM records. I don't think radios were then in use, whether because of cost, or the need for aerials, or batteries were not then in use.

Skiing in the late 1930s and early 1940s was for the hardy and the adventurous unless you were a Norwegian or Finn, in which case it was part of the everyday life they had grown up with. There were few people skiing on Grouse then so you got to know or recognize all. A rough guess would be 100 to 150 in the first years we skied. Laurillard's was one of the first in the city. It was located next to a hotel that had a beer parlour and as the years passed, he spent his day in the beer parlour and left young friends to work in the store. There was a manufacturer located on Georgia by Denman, Davidson, who by the War end, was making a wood ski. I got a pair by 1950, plus or minus a year. Before the era of laminates, local skis were made of ash and maple. Hickory, the most expensive, may have been made by Davidson, but more likely in the East. Skis came without steel edges. One paid to have them fitted or bought and mounted them themselves. Though I have a memory of putting on edges, I couldn't have. I had no skill with a chisel or a drill. Henry would have done the work or most of it. Skis were, in the early years, bought at the Bay, Eatons and Woodwards.

How different the world of skiing was in the 1930s and 1940s from that of today. We didn't, as teenagers, feel any obligation to dress in fashion. Warmth was the fashion. Henry and I and our friends wore the clothes we played or worked in in the city, but more of it. Regrettably, the boots I can't recall. I suspect we wore them hiking up and down the mountain at some time as well as for skiing. I doubt that most of the young took lessons in skiing or took them for any length of time. There would be two to three people who taught on Grouse. They couldn't have earned a living doing so; and they were probably not identifiable as instructors. I was reminded of this aspect of the sport the other day on Blackcomb where there were instructors wherever you looked because I was run down by one.

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Those were the days when snowplowing on skis was one's introduction to going downhill. With time, the plow was modified to a smaller angle, the stem turn, and then the skis were parallel till the next turn. There was then a further narrowing of the plow, the stem christiana. The fourth stage was the christiana – the Christie – where the skis stayed parallel.

How different were the runs then from today's groomed slopes and those that are mogulled. The skiers then weren't doing short hops that carved up the hillside. The style of skiing was the graceful parallel turn that took time and space and seldom was there a smooth packed slope to ski. The snowfalls too were deeper so the skis would be under the snow and not riding on the surface as today.

After 1945, I may have skied on Grouse but at some time, through the Newman Club, I began to go to Mount Baker. By then, some grooming of slopes, but not as today, was underway. If we didn't drink our way to Baker, we did on the return.

That I was still downhill skiing was not due to any love for skiing I had acquired before joining the RCAF. It was probably the result of a trip taken with friends - I don't know who – to Diamond Head Lodge in Garibaldi Park. The year must have been 1947 for the Lodge was completed in 1945 or 6 and by 1947 I had started working for the Brandvolds, the builders of the Lodge.

If I returned to Grouse after the War, it was not likely to ski. At some time, the cabin, with many others, collapsed or was taken down because by the War end, it was discovered that money could be made out of providing facilities for skiing. Cabin's were not just in the way. They were on land owned or leased by whatever the Grouse operation called itself.

In the early years of skiing one skied usually on one mountain: Grouse or Hollyburn or Seymour. It was a strenuous sport for most people who skied for the day, who didn't have cabins. Grouse hill would be about a two hour walk up to the chalet. If you couldn't afford the 25¢ or whatever modest amount was paid to use the rope tow, you climbed upon foot or herring-boned after each run. The rope tow was short but not an easy hold. Chairs arrived after the war.

I don't know when I retired my ash skies. They were small because I was probably 5'4" when I began skiing at about age 14. By the end of the War I was 6" to 7" taller and I acquired, somehow a pair of laminated wood skis made by Davidsons. He was a boat builder turned to ski maker as well.

It will be impossible for the present denizens of Vancouver to visualize what it was like for the hardy people who skied on the North Shore mountains when rope tows were first built. The tows were used both by downhill skiers and jumpers. The vertical service could not have been more than 300 feet. If one skied on a Saturday or Sunday and didn't have a cabin and had no car, skis and poles were carried on board a streetcar that ran to the West or North Vancouver ferries. We probably left home by 7, boarded the car with skis that were a foot longer than those now in use and long poles. If they weren't bamboo with 5" diameter baskets, they were untapered aluminium. Then, for the Grouse bound, walking to the North Vancouver ferry from Hastings for a 20 minute crossing and then the Lonsdale streetcar to about 27th Street. Then 10 to 15 minutes walk on paved road and so up the trail to the Chalet. Depending on snow conditions, the walk, possibly 2,500 fee vertical was 2 hours - less for the fit. The walk was in ski boots if you didn't carry them in a trapper Nelson wood framed pack, with lunch and extra clothes.

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Those with cabins would go up in the evening, wash last week's dishes once the stove was hot enough to boil water, drank rye or rum and coke (no one drank wine in those days, at the cabins, and beer was too heavy to carry), ate, stayed up late and hoped someone else would start the fire in the stove in the morning. There was no electric power and batteries weren't small enough for power. We all had hand cranked gramophones and 78 RPM records.

There were three cabin communities: Hollyburn, Grouse and Seymour and the owners stayed on their own mountain unless they were racing or jumping. My brother and I were Grouse skiers, if what I was doing could be called skiing. I was probably clumsy, afraid, shy and quiet so as a skier I would be known as Henry's little brother. I knew by sight and name, the best of the skiers. Who among the group is still alive? Some would have died in the War. The rest being one to 10 or more years older will have died of old age or ailments or gone to a warmer climate. I may be the only one still skiing.

I don't recall how many seasons I tried to ski on Grouse – two or three. In the last year, I still worked in the Shipyard, Burrard Drydock (which looks from the Lonsdale side today as it looked then, minus people). Henry by 1942 must have been in the army. By late 1942, I was 18 and joined the RCAF. I would have gone to the Edmonton Manning Depot by the next two to three months. Bad skiing delayed my entry. I sprained an ankle and walked down the mountain and home. If there was first aid available I didn't use it and I don't know where the accident occurred, whether on the ski hill or skiing down the trail to the cabin. The walk down did enough damage that I was delayed in going to Edmonton till about May, about a three to four month delay. I sometimes wonder if I survived the War because of the sprain.

That I am still skiing I can't attribute to my days on Grouse, looking down the hill for a long time before going down. If I skied the year the War ended or the year after, I don't know. I wouldn't have if something hadn't induced me to get new skis, whether girls or the Newman Club or the social aspect of going to or returning from skiing.

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