



## Skiing and National Parks

Scandinavian immigrants brought the sport of skiing to Canada in the late 1800s. The sport included ski touring, ski-racing, ski joring (a skier being pulled by a horse or a dog), and ski jumping. Downhill ski-racing (or ski running as it was sometimes called) developed into a separate discipline with the refinement of technique and equipment in the 1920s and 1930s. New techniques, equipment, and the introduction of lifts in the 1920s and 1930s increased its popularity considerably.<sup>1</sup>

The establishment of a club at Norquay in Banff in the 1920s and the gradual development of a ski hill there reflected this.<sup>2</sup> Parks officials encouraged ski-related developments as it reflected the emphasis at the time on parks as resorts or playgrounds. This trend continued in the 1950s (and the number of skiers increased greatly), although by the 1960s there were questions being raised about resort development and the 1964 National Park Policy sought to move away from or at least reduce the emphasis on parks as playgrounds. Proposals for intensifying ski development at Lake Louise in the 1970s caused significant national protest and further moved parks away from the playground model.<sup>3</sup>

## Ski Hill Proposals at Waterton<sup>4</sup>

If the volume of paperwork crossing a superintendent's desk on a single subject is a measure of burgeoning public interest, skiing proposals won hands down in the mid-1950s and 1960s. Inquiries and applications poured into the Waterton office, each an eager plea to be first in line should development for skiing proceed in the park.

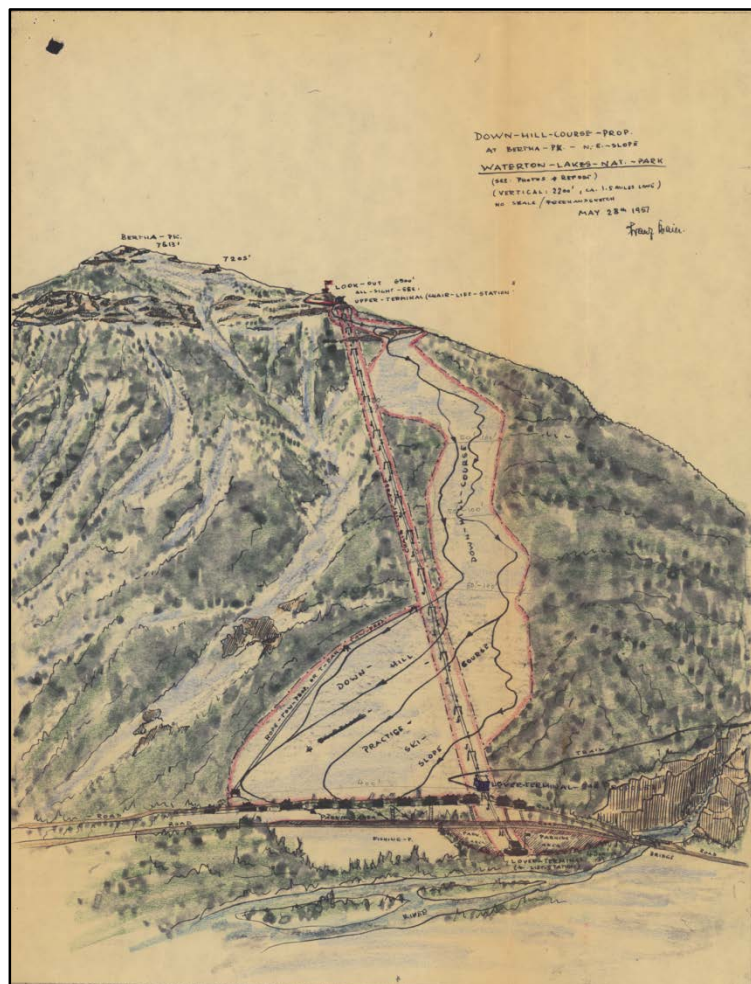
Between 1953 and 1968,<sup>5</sup> a period in which five different park superintendents<sup>6</sup> served Waterton, multiple inquiries regarding ski proposals were sent to the park seeking permission to construct gondola or T-bar lifts at various locations. Each proposal, whether sketchy or detailed was shared with the Ottawa office for thorough examination and discussion.

Superintendent James Atkinson expressed his doubts about such developments from the outset noting in his 1953 annual report: "From the press and other sources it could be construed that [winter sports activities] in Waterton have reached a point where they are of great importance. This is not so and because of the location of the Park, it is not to be expected that they will do so for some years to come. As a matter of fact, the slopes available for skiing are not very numerous and, with the exception of those on the Akamina Road, are subject to being cleared of snow by either wind, or by sun, during periods of high temperatures. This makes the area unsuited to the purpose, to some extent and will take time to find suitable areas, and then develop them."<sup>7</sup>

Among those who expressed interest and contacted the park superintendents directly were Ed McNally and Garth Enerson, both of whose families had cabins in the park and



were considered reputable professionals in Lethbridge.<sup>8</sup> Others were G. Brewerton and S. Lee of Cardston,<sup>9</sup> Stahl, Miles & Co. Ltd. of Edmonton,<sup>10</sup> Claude B. Brewster of Banff, Robert Chartier of Picture Butte, John Jaeggi of Banff, E. H. Gammon of Banff, Frank Goble of the Waterton Ski Club among several lawyers representing clients.<sup>11</sup> They all had their own suggestions for the ideal location and the kind of lift installations they had in mind. Most suggested both winter skiing and summer sightseeing operation of lifts to make the investment worthwhile. None apparently knew that in the event the government decided to have Waterton developed for skiing, each interested party would be required to submit their proposal via a formal tender. The first to come had no assurance of being chosen.



*Sketch of a proposal for runs and lift put forth by Franz Baier on Bertha Peak. Officials rejected the proposal. (Library and Archives Canada, e 0111651624)*

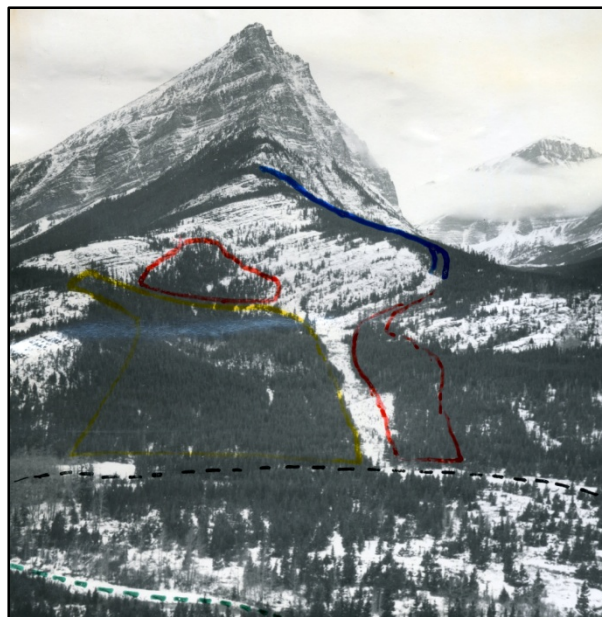
Meanwhile, at another site on a low divide between Lineham Creek and Rowe Creek facing northeast<sup>12</sup> another, if modest, ski run opened and employed a rope tow, albeit without official sanction.<sup>13</sup> Paul Klaas, a Swiss ski expert,<sup>14</sup> operated the rope tow there for two winters from 1952 through 1954.<sup>15</sup> The park shut down the Lineham operation on the basis that it was undesirable to have a ski development in the Cameron Creek watershed which was the source of the water supply for the Waterton Townsite.<sup>16</sup>

As applications and inquiries mounted, the Chief of the National Parks Branch, J. R. B. Coleman advised the park superintendent of comments from the Minister in charge: "If ski facilities were to be developed in the park, the only direct assistance that could be considered by the department, would be the clearing and stabilization of the ski slopes

and the construction, equipment and manning of first aid shelters....The problem, as you will understand, is somewhat complicated and would have to be the subject of a detailed study by the department before a decision could be made."<sup>17</sup> There were other considerations as well. While Waterton was known to receive unusually heavy snowfall

in short periods of time, Chinook winds were known to dissipate the snow just as rapidly. The weather was a primary consideration.<sup>18</sup>

In 1961, officials in Ottawa requested staff experts do a thorough examination of every potential site in the park.<sup>19</sup> Waterton's Chief Park Warden Frank Camp and his Banff counterpart, Walter Perren, made an extensive site study which was completed in the spring of 1961.<sup>20</sup> The team detailed 20 factors at each of six locations: Bertha Peak, Bear's Hump, the north east slope of Crandell Mountain, the north slope of Crandell Mountain, Lineham Mountain and the Forum area of British Columbia, although Forum was outside the park. Only the latter two locations were rated "ideal" for snow reliability but had other deficiencies. None of the six locations was perfect.



*Proposed runs for Mount Lineham all of which were rejected. (Photo: WLNPA Archives)*

Officials in Ottawa, as well as Waterton, were cautiously protective of the park's natural wonders and vistas. A year-round gondola from the Bear's Hump proposed by Claude Brewster was turned down because it visually infringed on the main features of the park, the sudden junction of the prairies and the mountains.<sup>21</sup> Others wanting to erect a ski lift at the same location were similarly rejected. The short season in Waterton for good snow conditions, it was suggested, would not be economically sound.<sup>22</sup> Development on Mount Lineham proper was dismissed because of the fact that some of the land was still under private ownership<sup>23</sup> as well as potential risk to the water shed.

Despite assurances from the Minister of Northern Affairs Walter Dinsdale in 1961 that the government's new policy was to promote winter sports in national parks, there was nothing in the making for Waterton's ski future.<sup>24</sup> The final blow came in the 1965 with the announcement by Ottawa officials in Ottawa that \$9 million would be invested to develop Banff National Park's ski facilities. Two days later, the results of the survey done by Camp and Perren in 1961 was made public: "None of the surveys have shown that a good ski site exists within the confines of the park."<sup>25</sup>

In the years to come, skiing in Waterton would be limited to the cross country variety but efforts were made not only to groom trails but also ensure the trails were patrolled.<sup>26</sup> Skiing in the park continues to be a very popular winter activity, for self-propelled individuals, with a groomed ski trail from Little Prairie to Cameron Lake and for the more adventuresome back country users, destinations for ski touring and snowboarding focused primarily along the Continental Divide.

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Bailey and Murray Shaw. "Alpine Skiing." In *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Historica Canada, 1985—. Article published November 21, 2011

<sup>2</sup> Chic Scott, *Powder Pioneers: Ski Stories from the Canadian Rockies and Columbia Mountains* (Calgary: Rocky Mountain Books, 2005), pages 40-43, 102-112.

<sup>3</sup> C.J. Taylor, "National Parks," Gerald Hollowell, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Canadian History* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2004), pages 431-432. See also: Canada, Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, Natural and Historic Resources Branch, *National Parks Policy*. ([Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1964]), p. 3, 21, 18; Paul Kopas, *Taking the Air: Ideas and Change in Canada's National Parks* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 61-62; C. J. Taylor, "Banff in the 1960s: Divergent Views of the National Park Ideal," 133-152 in Campbell, ed., *A Century of Parks Canada*.

<sup>4</sup> In preparing this piece, the author was struck by an apparent indecisiveness by park authorities both in Waterton and in Ottawa. When proposals and inquiries starting arriving in 1953, however short on details they may have been, they were sent to Ottawa for both information and action. There was an apparent reluctance to make a decision about how to handle this unexpected matter with the result that no solid plan was undertaken until 1961. Meanwhile, potential proponents, wishing to begin engineering studies, were left with vague replies. The author has made no effort to incorporate this indecisiveness into the piece but it should be noted that it did affect the ability to put dates to some issues.

<sup>5</sup> Library and Archives Canada, RG-84, A-2-a, Vol. 2223, file W 312-4, pt. 3. Memorandum for file, S. Kun, Ottawa, March 23, 1961. Library and Archives Canada, RG-84, A-2-a, Vol. 2223, file W 312-4, pt. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Superintendents were J. Atkinson, T. W. Pierce, F. C. Browning, J. A. Pettis and W. J. Lunney.

<sup>7</sup> Superintendent's Report 1953, WLNP Archives, Box 207, Item 13.

<sup>8</sup> The McNally cabin is still in the family and is located at 205 Waterton Avenue; the cabin owned by the Enerson family was at 128 Evergreen Avenue.

<sup>9</sup> Memorandum for file, S. Kun, Ottawa, March 23, 1961.

<sup>10</sup> Library and Archives Canada, RG-84, Vol. 2223, file W 312-4, pt. 2. Letter to J. Atkinson, Superintendent, Waterton Lakes National Park, from M. J. Miles, President, Stahl, Miles and Company, Oct. 28, 1955.

<sup>11</sup> Library and Archives Canada, RG-84, Vol. 2223, file W312-4, pts. 3 & 4.

<sup>12</sup> Personal communication between the author and Rob Watt, former park employee, Jan. 10, 2015. WLNP Archives Box 132, Item 27.

<sup>13</sup> Memorandum for file, S. Kun, Ottawa, March 23, 1961.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Klaas would go on to develop a ski facility at Castle Mountain, north of the park. Steven Kenworthy, *For Skiing Pleasure Unlimited: A History of West Castle to Castle Mountain Resort 1965 to 2007* (Canada: Castle Mountain Community Association, 2014), pages 22, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Library and Archives Canada, RG-84, A-2—a, vol. 2223, file W312-4, part 3. Memorandum for File, by S. Kun, Ottawa, March 23, 1961.

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<sup>16</sup> Library and Archives Canada, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 223, file W312-4, pt. 3. Memorandum for file, "Proposals and Applications for Ski Run, Ski Lift and Sightseeing Lift Developments."

<sup>17</sup> Memorandum to J. Atkinson, Superintendent, Waterton Lakes National Park, from J. R.B. Coleman, Chief, National Parks Branch, Ottawa. March 7, 1955. WLNP Archives Box 152, Item 10.

<sup>18</sup> Library and Archives Canada, RG-84, A-2-a, vol. 2223, file W312-4, pt.2. Memorandum to J. R. B. Coleman, Director, National Parks Branch, Ottawa, from Loyd Brooks, Chief of Planning, Ottawa, Oct. 31, 1960

<sup>19</sup> Two earlier studies, one by Bruno Engler and one by Franz Baier, were both rejected by park officials.

<sup>20</sup> Ski Development Site Survey, WLNP Archives, Box 152, Item 12.

<sup>21</sup> Letter to C. W. Brewster, Banff, from W. J. Lunney, superintendent, Waterton Lakes National Park, Sept. 5, 1968. Library and Archives Canada, R-84-A-2, Vol. 2223, File W-312-4, pt. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Memorandum to Director, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa, from W. McKim, Regional Director, Calgary, Sept. 13, 1968. Library and Archives Canada, R-84-A-2, Vol. 2223, File W-312-4, pt. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Letter to Superintendent, Waterton Lakes National Park from J.R.B. Coleman, Chief, Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, Dec. 4, 1954. WLNP Archives, Box 152, Item 10. The Lineham Estate still owned freehold land acquired during the Oil City sales fiasco after 1908 and before the park was enlarged to encompass the property in 1914. The land was purchased by the government in 1966.

<sup>24</sup> "Minister Visits Waterton: Tourist Industry Critics Sell It Short," *Lethbridge Herald*, Dec. 16, 1961, 2. WLNP Archives. Box 130, Item 27.

<sup>25</sup> "No Promise In Surveys at Waterton," *Lethbridge Herald*, March 17, 1965, 18. WLNP Archives. Box 130, Item 27.

<sup>26</sup> "Waterton Plans Winter Action," *Lethbridge Herald*, June 14, 1977, 18. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 29.