



Arapahoe Basin

This article series focuses on history of the 10th Mountain Division, the famous “soldiers on skis” who fought in the Italian mountains during World War II. Throughout the winter, the series will be exploring the forces behind the creation of the 10th Mountain Division, why and how it was founded, their achievements during the war, and significant impacts the veterans had on the ski and wilderness industry after the war.

As the men of the 10th Mountain Division returned from helping to end World War II, these mountain men, now veterans, continued to spend time in the mountains.

Recreational skiing became more accessible in America after the war with the help of the 10th Mountain Division. As one veteran, Dev Jennings, says, they “were the experienced ones, the ones that knew how to ski and understood the mountains and understood the weather and those things, and they just naturally fell into the mountain division, then into the ski industry.”

Like many 10th Mountain Division soldiers, Larry Jump attended Eastern private schools and learned to ski there. After being injured in the war, Jump returned to the Colorado mountains that he, like many men of the 10th, had grown to love while at Camp Hale.

While working for the Denver Chamber of Commerce in 1946, Jump came across a mountain that he would eventually develop into the first ski area in Colorado after the war – Arapahoe Basin. Arapahoe Basin, Inc. was formed with the help of many stockholders and investors, and they concentrated on appealing to local skiers from Denver and Boulder.

Keeping contact with many other 10th veterans, Jump invited “any Camp Hale men to visit us...” and by January of 1952, it was believed that most of the 87th regiment had come to Arapahoe Basin.

Several other 10th Mountain Division veterans were instrumental in solidifying the area as a major ski resort. Earl Clark moved to Denver after the war, where he became a member of the National Ski Patrol and volunteered to lead the ski patrol at Arapahoe Basin on weekends.

Wilfred “Slim” Davis, another 10th veteran, devoted 40 years to the U.S. Forest Service as a ski-sport builder. He was essential for the establishment, designing the trail

layout. Additionally, Merrill Hastings returned after serving in the mountain troops and joined the construction crew in building Arapahoe Basin.

Although there was one rope tow during the first season, Jump installed a single chair lift by the second season to compete with other mountains in the area. Hundreds of local middle-class skiers, with a new increase in leisure time and spending money, would cause forty-five minute waits and crowd the parking lot every weekend.

The first Pomalift at A-Basin was installed in 1953 and Pomalift was soon incorporated under Arapahoe Basin, Inc. This partnership, selling lifts all over the country, helped create ski areas for beginners. Meanwhile, advanced skiers benefited from the chairlifts, which increased the available terrain. Small community hills with little to no uphill transportation faded away.

By the 1950s, A-Basin, along with Aspen, had been established as one of the major ski resorts in Colorado. Today, A-Basin is known for its long ski seasons as one of the first areas open in mid-October, and one of the last to close for the season in mid-June.

Arapahoe Basin, as the first ski area opened in Colorado after the war, represented a trend of 10th veterans that enforced an immense influence over the boom of the ski industry. Members of the 10th built ski resort, mapped trails, were ski patrol and ski instructors, and supported the industry in other countless ways.

Sources:

- David Leach's 2005 senior thesis for Middlebury College, "The Impact of the Tenth Mountain Division on the Development of a Modern Ski Industry in Colorado and Vermont: 1930-1965."
- "Fire on the Mountain," First Run Features/Gage & Gage Productions, 1995.
- Colorado Ski & Snowboard Museum archives