



10th Veterans Jump Start Winter Park

Many ski resorts in Colorado had a distinct disadvantage of being isolated and not easily accessible in the 1920s and '30s, but not Winter Park.

In 1923, construction on the Moffatt Tunnel began, an important link between Colorado's western slope and Denver. In the 1930s, George Cranmer of Denver Parks & Recreation suggested building a winter sports area.

A ski jump and a few trails were built close to the railroad in 1937. The following year, Denver skiers were shuttled by train to Grand Valley. By 1939, the ski area was renamed Winter Park and the first J-bar went into operation in December. Until WWII began, Winter Park existed as Colorado's most successful ski area without a chairlift or expert terrain.

Throughout the 1940s and '50s, additional tows and T-bars were added for the growing number of skiers, and the Eskimo Ski Club and Winter Park Ski School were established in 1947. Soon after, the city of Denver created the nonprofit Winter Park Recreation Association to run the resort.

In 1958, the Winter Park Ski Jump School was organized under the direction of Harold Sorensen, a 10th Mountain Division veteran. A native of Norway, Sorensen immigrated to the U.S. in 1929 and taught skiing to troops in the U.S., Britain and Italy. After the war, he began the ski jumping program at Winter Park, which was free to kids age 4 to 18. Sorensen's teaching influenced notable jumpers like Torger Tokle (also a member of the 10th, who died in battle), Art Devlin, Jay Rand and the Perry-Smith brothers. He was given the Russell Wilder Memorial Award for his program at Winter Park, "focusing on the interests of America's youth on the sport of skiing."

Crosby Perry-Smith, who won the National Jumping Championship at age 14, returned to Colorado after serving in the 10th. He coached junior jumpers at the Winter Park Ski Jump School for 16 years and the U.S. jumping team at the World University Games in Italy in 1985.

Additionally, Clif Taylor taught skiing at Winter Park, Loveland, Aspen and Mad River Glen (Vermont) after joining the 10th. From the 1960s to 80s, Taylor promoted his Graduated Length Method process for skiing and designed equipment. After appearing at a German conference, many ski schools in Austria, France and Switzerland adopted the method. After serving in the 1st Battalion, 87th Mountain Infantry as a Lieutenant and officer supervisor of military ski training, Earl Clark moved to Denver. A member of the National Ski Patrol, Clark patrolled at Winter Park, Berthoud Pass, Loveland and Arapahoe Basin.

From the 1960s to the '80s, Winter Park continued to expand. New chairlifts were installed, the Winter Park race team created, base area facilities renovated and snowmaking abilities acquired.

Winter Park Ski Area, comprised of Winter Park, Mary Jane Basin and Vasquez Ridge, was owned and operated by Denver until 2002, when Intrawest took over management. For nearly 70 years, the Winter Park Ski Train, a historic snow-sports icon, was a popular way for Denver skiers to access the resort via the Moffatt Tunnel; operations ceased in 2009.

The impact of the 10th Mountain Division men who returned after the war helped to establish Winter Park as a major ski area in Colorado. Their influence is still felt today in the ski patrol, ski school and in countless other aspects of Winter Park Ski Area.

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