



Hollyburn Heritage Society

Issue No. 17 – December 2013

Since 1998 Hollyburn Heritage Society has been producing an annual newsletter to inform you of the history & heritage of Cypress Mountain ski area and other local mountains. A small group of society volunteers have preserved almost 100 years of recreational activity since the first ascent of Hollyburn in 1908 by Vancouver Mountaineering Club, forerunner of B.C. Mountaineering Club.

Incorporated April 2000 and has registered charitable donation status with Canada Customs & Revenue Agency. We welcome financial donations for which you will receive a receipt for an income tax deduction, if over \$25. Small donations assist in publication of this newsletter and other society programs that are mandate for HHS. In the last year prospects are improving for the restoration or rebuild the venerable heritage Hollyburn Lodge. Now as HHS principal project, to which larger (> \$100) donations are allotted. To date, there is almost \$23,000 in this fund. This lodge was constructed in 1926 at its present site, 3,000 ft. elevation, beside First Lake, using reclaimed materials from a building at 2,500 ft. elev. part of then abandoned Nasmyth logging operation.

Membership to HHS is by way of donation: financial – volunteer time – items: photographs, vintage movies (prior to 1970), news articles. Please – no equipment – we have no place to store it. “Cypress Mountain,” the ski operator permits us to display panels in the Back Room, Hollyburn Lodge. They have also unique display of photographs in the Heritage area of Cypress Creek Lodge.

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Accomplishments

This year the focus was on Hollyburn Lodge. HHS was seeing finally some “light at the end of the tunnel” – yes siree! September it was announced that District of West Vancouver was to become owner of the lodge. Kevin Healy, who managed construction of Cypress Mountain’s “Cypress Creek Lodge”, would manage work on Hollyburn Lodge. Before we all get excited at the prospect of a renewed lodge, much work needs to be completed before the hammering of nails in construction. Environmental assessment – drafting building plans – building permits. Yep, not like those old days, when building was simple.

HHS Annual Meeting

We held our meeting on Wednesday May 15th in the Audio-visual Room, West Vancouver Seniors’ Centre. We had one of the best attendance by members, West Van Councillor MaryAnn Booth attended and presented an overview on the progress of the restoration/rebuild of Hollyburn Lodge. Definite progress has been made. (More on that later)

Bob Tapp, one of the original founders for our organization in 1997, when it was called “Hollyburn Ski Camp Heritage Project,” decided to retire his position as Co Chair and as a director. Gordon Knight also relinquished his position as Co Chair, but has remained as a director. This made way for Cheryl Leskiw to join as director. Directors for 2013-14 now include: Michael Barnes, Jamie Bennett, Don Grant, Gordon Knight and Cheryl Leskiw. Don has taken over as Chairman.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

HHS AGM for 2014

Will take place Wednesday May 28th, 2014.
Time: 7:30 pm – Location – West Vancouver Seniors’ Centre, northwest corner 21st Street & Marine Drive. New members welcome.

22nd 2014 Pioneer Skiers’ Reunion

Will take place Wednesday September 17th at Cypress Mountain’s “Cypress Creek Lodge” (located in the downhill ski area) - noon to 4 pm.

If you skied Vancouver local mountains 1960/70 and beyond, come out and enjoy meeting some of us – maybe some old friends.

The First Funmakers of Hollyburn

It isn’t known whether First Nations people participated in climbing mountains for fun like Western Europeans. The peak of Hollyburn was first climbed by a group from Vancouver Mountaineering Club in 1908. Similar to many recreational areas, logging industry provided the opportunity for area on Hollyburn to be used later for “fun.”

How did this all take place During WWI, it was demand for spruce lumber used in building aircraft where James Nasmyth developed his talent logging in Queen Charlotte Islands. As the war wound down, he returned his equipment to Burnaby to log there. Then with much demand for lumber to build houses Nasmyth turned to logging in West Vancouver. The lower areas had been logged near end of 19th century, but Nasmyth saw abundant timber up on Hollyburn Mountain. Problem – getting it to tidewater. Like eastern loggers using rivers as flumes, Mr. A.J. Johnson, a civil engineer, helped Nasmyth to develop a constructed flume system on Hollyburn. Water was required. Johnson explored Hollyburn plateau area and found

abundant water, but it must be collected into a single drainage system to service the flume. With end of war, many returning veterans skilled in trench digging were available to hand dig trenches on the plateau area to connect and produce several small artificial lakes. Starting at the present location of Hollyburn Lodge, there is First Lake; on present day power line, Second, Third and Fourth Lakes (behind Warming Hut); higher on Pacific Run, Fifth & Sixth Lakes. Starting below outlet of Marr Creek from First Lake, Nasmyth had constructed a flume that slanted west down across Hollyburn flank to tidewater in English Bay – foot 28th Street. His system worked as long as there was lots of water to slide the timber products down the flume. Nasmyth logged until a few no snow winters and/or drought summers, when the system failed. By 1923, although he had many orders, his logging operation failed – no water!

Rudolph Verne – For Fun and For Firsts

Now we have a setting for the followers – West Van kids seeking adventure followed Nasmyth trails; folks out for a hike, found the trails. Gerry Hardman and his pals from West Van High found them and had loads of fun in the sawdust piles of now abandoned Nasmyth mill.

Then one day in May, 1923 Rudolph Verne and a friend had been admiring the gorgeous snows on the North Shore mountains. They set out one Sunday intending to hike up Grouse Mountain. Unfortunately, they took the wrong ferry and ended up at Ambleside wharf in West Vancouver. Looking up, they saw no snow, so left their “ski” at the wharf and followed roads and trails up Hollyburn until they reached the now abandoned Nasmyth lumber mill camp. After lunch they decided to hike further; this brought them to First Lake and continuing on they finally reached the peak of Hollyburn, like those hikers in 1908. What a view! On that clear sky day they saw Mt. Rainier, east of Seattle!

Rudolph was first to see potential for fun on the mountain. An interesting character, he was Swedish and immigrated to Canada sometime in the second decade of 1900s. Like many others, he headed west and arrived at Calgary. Also like others, first thing – get a job. He got one - with the Imperial Bank of Commerce (forerunner to CIBC). He was an energetic fellow, liked to get involved in fun things. He skied and also a figure skater. The bank posted him to Banff – lots to do there in summer, but winter – nothing. Thought everybody hibernated. He proposed to Banff Council that they have a Winter Festival. It was held in February and drew crowds from Calgary for a fun weekend. After Verne returned to Calgary, Banff continued for many decades to have this festival. Back in Calgary, Verne had an idea – there was the Stampede Grandstand. Why not construct a ski jump on its roof. Would allow crowds to see the ski jumpers from the surrounding ground area! Indeed it was held. And - Calgary really got into it. Fire chief, Cappy Smart, with his trucks drove around town at noon wailing their sirens to publicize this event. It was said that 10,000 turned out that weekend to see the ski jumpers.

1922, Rudolph got an invitation to come to Vancouver to be “The Pro” (club professional figure skating instructor) with Connaught Skating Club. This writer recalls him with this club until WWII. He also lived in Vancouver “west end” where he had a view of North Shore mountains. The previous winter Vancouver had snow – to provide fun for the locals on a Sunday, Verne organized a ski race around Stanley Park, the first ski race in Vancouver. In spring, this venture was followed by the hike up Hollyburn.

During the summer he hatched the idea to develop the abandoned lumber camp into a place for ski fun – there was the cookhouse that could be made into a restaurant; sawdust piles for mini ski hills; the regular terrain for steeper ski slope. It might be noted that Verne had the

idea, but got others to carry out his idea. Thus, he met up with a Norwegian, Eilif Haxthow.

Eilif makes Rudolph’s Plan a Reality

Eilif arrived in Vancouver December 1924, scouting around for a job; he had one offer, but declined when he met Rudolph Verne. Verne, a friendly Swede who had come to Canada 15 years earlier told Eilif he had rented an old logging camp on Hollyburn and planned to start a ski camp there for winter snow fun. Fix up a couple buildings, rent out skis and sell coffee and sandwiches. Would Eilif be interested? Indeed he was and found another Swede, Hjalmer Fahlander as helper.

Together they assembled the ski camp that was Verne’s concept – but not with his money. Eilif & Hjalmer sank their last cent into this venture. However, they hoped to recoup when the guests came. This venture was not easy! Half hour ferry ride to West Vancouver, then climb the mountain to 1,800 feet (900M). Everything had to be carried up on your back - food, hardware, tools, cement. They made it in time for Christmas celebration. Celebrate they did – Christmas porridge, bacon, coffee, cigars and good stuff, presents & mail, song and fun!

January 11, 1925 saw a magnificent stream of people come to enjoy fun in the snow – all skis were rented and restaurant busy. Guests glided on the snow and slid down the hills on their bums – what fun was had! They took in \$8; snow made the difference. Just in time, they had been subsisting on flour & oatmeal, with the odd rabbit steak – the result of a snare. Then things got thin again. But with new snow, January 28th they had over 100 guests and took in over \$30. A group of wood workers came and used the big cabin and left behind unused food – ham, pork, butter, cheese.

February they were joined by another Swede, Erik Ahlberg. Publicity in Vancouver *Province*

went a long way to bring up folks on Sundays to enjoy fun in the snow – skiing. To get them up on Saturday nights and when the weather foul, they decided to try having “a dance.” They acquired a gramophone and held a dance on Saturday evening in their Rococo Hall! Partying until 2; stayed overnight; those poor souls looked bedraggled on Sunday morning, but we got their 40 cents. And that was great!

Winter snow disappeared with spring, but Saturday night dances kept some money coming until the heat of summer made hiking no fun. The guys at the ski camp enjoyed the environment – a bit of hunting – to rise on early sunny morning – stand on the verandah and “breathe in the fresh morning air then one feels like a million.” These guys really enjoyed life on the mountain - spare time found them exploring area we know today as Cypress Mountain. They were able to work with some loggers until fire season. However, one requires money for food, so this life was interrupted to find work elsewhere to pay for it.

Late September 1925 they returned to their heaven and the ski camp started to thrive – with Saturday night dances. Fahlander had left, but Eilif with Erik carried on. A Sunday early October they entertained almost 70 Vancouver journalists and the West Vancouver Council. This was a big party – over 120 pounds of food was packed up the mountain – new tableware – kitchen decorated and a table for 30 set up. By now, a notable Vancouver writer Pollough Pogue had published several articles in Vancouver *Province* on Hollyburn and the ski camp. This helped business immeasurably winter, 1925-26 despite it being one of the mildest in 20 years.

If this was a measure for a snowless winter where the best skiing was up on the plateau, then Rudolph Verne, who had bought the ski camp May 1, 1926, his best decision was to move it up to First Lake. This was now important as their competitor on Grouse

Mountain had started to build a road and a hotel. Eilif faded from his duties at the ski camp and moved on to other endeavours.

Enter the Three Swedes

To move the ski camp, Verne contracted with three Swedish woodsmen, Oscar Pearson, Andrew Irving and Ole Anderson. District of West Vancouver leased Verne land adjacent to First Lake. The ski camp was deconstructed; the materials moved to First Lake on a stone boat hauled by a team of horses and the lodge rebuilt substantially to what it is today, almost 90 years later.

Continuing with more firsts for Verne, “Hollyburn Ski Camp” was officially opened January 16, 1927, as the first such camp on the coast of Pacific Northwest, as headquarters for Hollyburn Pacific Ski Club. The camp combined a restaurant, a dormitory and a dance hall complete with a gramophone.

Not to be outdone, April 1927, Verne held the first organized ski races for men and women. 1928, when Los Angeles was awarded 1932 Summer Olympic Games, Verne proclaimed that Hollyburn has everything that St. Moritz has to hold an Olympics.

This is “the Why” that Rudolph Verne, Eilif Haxthow and the three Swedes developed these facilities, they enjoyed seeing people having fun on the snowy slopes of Hollyburn as much as those folks that hiked there to have fun in the snow – skiing, snowshoeing.

Footnote – to HHS Newsletter Issue No. 16 December 2012 story “The Burfields of Hollyburn” - Fred Burfield passed away January 2013, two months short age 95.

Hollyburn Heritage Society is grateful for support of District of West Vancouver through their Community Grants Program