

History: Roots of skiing run deep in Echo Summit area

Publisher's note: *The following is from the January 1976 Lake Tahoe Historical Society newsletter.*

At the Society meeting of November 25, 1975, Haven Jorgenson, one-time manager of the Sierra Club Lodge on old Highway 40, shared his experiences as owner of Echo Chalet and one of the first ski areas in the Sierra Nevada.

Having seen Echo Chalet once on a casual summer trip, Haven purchased the place when he saw it for the second time, half-buried in the snows of January 1946. He started operations on February 1 with one 200 ft. rope tow, with a 75 ft. vertical rise from the foot to the top of the road. The tow was operated electrically with the help of an old Dodge transmission. There were no power lines into the area at the time, but Haven's own hydroplant produced the electricity required for his needs, including the heating of the Chalet. However, whenever the ski tow was operated, it was necessary to disconnect the heater.



Among the services provided was transportation from the highway parking lot up to the Chalet. Purchasing several old crank-type phones from the telephone company for \$2.00, he set these up in the parking lot, with a wire which lay in the snow and was connected to another instrument up at the Chalet. When a guest arrived at the parking lot, he cranked up the phone and someone would come down to take him up to the lodge on a sled pulled by a tractor.

He recalled the early day ski areas in the Echo Summit vicinity, which were several. Nebelhorn, built in 1947 by

Gordon Stang and Vic West who pioneered junior skiing with the Nebelhornets and the location of the first Far West Junior Championships on the West Coast. Audrain Lodge just below Echo Lake road. A dormitory was operated with a little tow in back at Vade. Tamarack Pines built about that same time by Vern Sprock who provided lodging and meals sometime before he took over Sierra Ski Ranch from the Barnett brothers. One of the first lifts in the area was built by Otto Schaeffer on the north side of the highway at Camp Sacramento. This was eventually taken over by Edelweiss which expanded and put the lifts on the opposite side of the highway. There was also a tow in the area of Strawberry Lodge, which was a very popular place, especially for evening entertainment.

After a successful first winter and learning the ropes of running a boat service during the summer, Haven built a 1000 ft. long tow to the top of the hill the following autumn and detailed his experiences in an era of doing everything for one's self.

His operation was primarily dormitory style at \$4.50 per day with three meals, but "bring your own sleeping bag." Six rooms in the main building were rented as hotel accommodations at \$13.50 for two including three meals. He later built several little cabins with kitchen facilities which rented for \$7.00 per day, \$45.00 per week for two but no meals. \$1.50 bought an all day ticket for ski tow and learn-to-ski lessons were free.

Haven described the early days when snow seldom came by Thanksgiving, but sometimes waited until February. Grooming of the hills was unknown. The manner and style of skiing was different than today and the well-dressed skier of those early days wore considerably less sophisticated attire than seen on the slopes in 1975.

He also recalled adventures of 1950's "big rains" which came down on 22 inches of snow in November. Water ran over the road at Camp Sacramento cutting a 20 ft. trench that closed the

highway for several weeks. Also, he remembered the heavy winter of 1952 as well as avalanches where occurred with loss of life at Echo Lake during 1948.

He closed his presentation with a showing of photographs and slides of snow and skiing in the Echo area and displayed a collection of ski posters, a menu from Strawberry Lodge, his old skis with bear trap bindings, and other memorabilia.