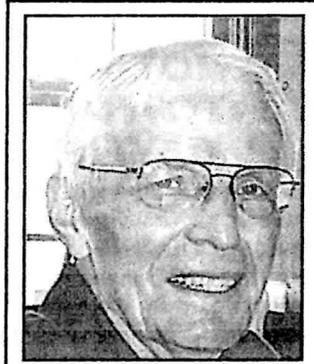


Mount Valhalla winter sports center history

OS-113/11
 The opening of the Mount Valhalla winter sports center, located on a north facing hill on the eastern edge of the Chequamegon National Forest, provided a new entertainment and recreation option for the people of Washburn. The project, initiated by skiing enthusiasts, businessmen and the mayor, was carried to completion through the close cooperation among those parties, the Chequamegon Ski Club, and U.S. Forest Service.



Lars Larson
 Guest Columnist

Work at the site began in early November 1936 with NYA youths clearing trees and brush for the construction of a "professional" and an "amateur" ski slides, and a 1,130-foot toboggan slide. In the summer and fall of 1937 a slalom course was constructed, the professional and amateur courses were enlarged, with jumps added; a 34-foot high scaffold was also erected at the top of the professional hill. The toboggan slide was extended to 1,785 feet, and warming shelters and "an enclosed log cabin with fireplace" were constructed. In early 1938, WPA workers constructed a large warming house, skating rink, parking areas, and a second toboggan slide, then in late summer a caretaker's house and a garage were added.

When complete, the Mount Valhalla winter sports center provided facilities for ski jumping on professional and amateur courses, tobogganing in two enclosed chutes, snowshoeing and cross country skiing on

cleared trails, a slalom course, ice skating, an "ash can" slide, and a sliding hill for children.

An "Opening and Inspection Day" was held on Sunday, December 13, 1936, attended by "several hundred residents" of Washburn and nearby communities. The popularity of the winter sports center was demonstrated a few weeks later, when an estimated 1,200 people, encouraged by "a perfect winter day" and extensive publicity, motored there, creating a traffic jam of some 300 cars along County Highway C, due to the lack of parking space. In mid-February an "Ashland Day" was held, to which the residents of that city were especially invited. In March, marking the end of the season, the first annual ski tournament was held, attracting an estimated 2,000 people from northern Wisconsin, Michigan and Minnesota. Sixty-seven of "the best skijumpers of the middlewest" competed on the profession-

al course, one of whom broke the 163-foot Wisconsin ski jump record with a jump of 165 feet.

Mount Valhalla opened for the 1937-38 season on December 26, 1937 with "noted ski riders" from Wisconsin, Michigan and Minnesota performing, while a lutefisk eating contest added "flavor" to the event. Attendance was estimated as "probably between 4,000 and 5,000" despite "zero weather," some 1,500 automobiles once again causing a monumental traffic jam along County Highway C. The best jumps on the professional course "were around 160 feet," the skiers preferring not to try for greater distance because of the flatness of the landing zone. The ski club arranged a full program for the remainder of the season, including the northern Wisconsin cross country and combined events championships. The high point of the season was the second annual ski-jumping tournament on Sunday, March 6. "Several dozen of the best ski-riders in Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin participated," with an estimated 2,000 to 2,500 spectators watching them perform on the professional course. The longest jump was 175 feet. The season closed on March 13 with a "Northern Wisconsin Winter Play Day," sponsored by the ski club and the WPA recreation department.

The program for the 1938-39 season included a "Twin Ports Day" to attract residents of Superior and Duluth to Mount Valhalla.

Despite a barrage of publicity, only about 225 people from those two cities attended. The climax of the season was the ski jumping tournament held on March 5. For this third annual event the city hung four large "Welcome" signs and 12 strings of pennants across Bayfield Street. About 100 expert skiers participated on the professional jumping hill, watched by an estimated 2,000 spectators. The longest jump was 180 feet, breaking the previous record of 175 feet but short of the 200 feet that professional skiers believed would be possible on the hill in the right conditions.

The size of the crowds at many of the weekend events almost equaled the population of Washburn (although some of the people were from other communities). Practically all of these people were passive spectators, however. Skiing was not yet a popular sport, and almost all skiing was downhill and jumping. These required considerable skill and were potentially dangerous, so were pursued by relatively few expert and amateur skiers. The other sports — tobogganing, skating, snow showing, sledding — were engaged in by children and younger adults (older people were understandably skeptical about riding a wooden board at 60 miles an hour down a toboggan chute in the close company of three other fools).