

# Washburn Community Affairs— Mt. Valhalla Winter Sports Center

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The Mt. Valhalla winter sports center, developed by WPA workers, continued in operation until the war began with "winter frolics," ski jumping tournaments, and other events. The center was also open to the public for recreational activities between these organized events. Typical was the 1940 season, which began on February 4th with a "Snow Frolic and Trail Tryout Day." A variety of snow sports were available, including cross-country skiing on nine miles of trails; downhill, slalom, and jumping courses; an ashcan slide; and two toboggan chutes, one 2,600 feet, and the second 600 feet long. Coffee and lunch were served at a "commisary cabin," and the main lodge, "with its new massive, rustic furniture and its fireplace and heater, will provide warmth and comfort for cold and weary snow sportsters." The fourth annual ski tournament, held in early March, was attended by an estimated 1,500 spectators. A contest to select a "Queen of the Valkyries" to reign over the tournament was held. The winner, a young woman from Ashland, crowned as "Queen of the Valkyries," along with two "Valkyrie princesses" from Washburn, reigned over the event from "a throne of ice" at the end of the outrun of the 50 meter hill. Over 100 skiers took part in the event, "the greatest in size and quality ever to compete at Valhalla," in the opinion of the Times. The hill record of 180 feet was broken several times with a new record of 193 feet set.

A unique event in early February of the 1940-41 season was a "Beauty On Skis" Picture Party," the purpose of which was to collect pictures of snow sports at Mt. Valhalla, for use by the ski club for publicity. Young women from northern Wisconsin were "invited to don their ski suits and come to the hills to serve as models for camera fans." It is not known



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how many "young women" and "camera fans" attended this event, although the Times later published several publicity photographs of women posing in a decorative role, apparently taken at this "picture party." The fifth annual ski tournament in early March was somewhat of a disappointment, a strong northeast wind preventing record breaking jumps on the big hill, now classified as a 60 meter hill. The longest jump was 185 feet, eight feet less than the record of 193 feet, and far short of the hoped-for 200 foot jump. The sixth annual ski jumping tournament was held in early March 1942, but for the second year in a row, skiing conditions, soft snow in the landing area, and a northeast wind precluded long jumps on the 60 meter hill. The longest jump was 186 feet, short of the hill record of 193 feet.

In June 1942 the ski club suspended its activities for the duration of the war. There is no record of any events at Mt. Valhalla during the war, although it remained open for public recreational use. At its first postwar meeting in September 1947, the Chequamegon Ski Club was re-

tivated and plans were discussed "for the maintenance and development of Mount Valhalla and the Washburn area as the outstanding winter sports center of northern Wisconsin." During a second meeting, held in October, a "bushy bee" to clear the slopes at Mt. Valhalla was planned, but no reports about this event appeared in the Times. In fact, there were no reports about Mt. Valhalla or the ski club during the remainder of the 1940s or throughout the 1950s, the elaborate plan to resurrect it as a winter sports center apparently having been given up. During the 1960s the Central Ski Association, supported by the Washburn Industrial and Area Development Corporation, used Mt. Valhalla as a ski jumping training site for a few years, with considerable work done to recondition the facilities, including the construction of a new scaffold for the 60 meter hill.

While praised as among the best in the tri-state area, Mount Valhalla never met the expectations of ski club members and community leaders that it would become a major winter sports center for the north country. There were several factors that probably were responsible: its isolated location; the lack of transportation, other than by automobile to Washburn and to the site; and the lack of accommodations for skiers, winter sport enthusiasts, and spectators in Washburn. Also, other ski hills had installed lifts to transport skiers to the top of hills, whereas at Mount Valhalla they were required to climb a long flight of steps. While it is not possible to know the extent of the impact of the Mount Valhalla winter sports center on the entertainment and recreational life of the people of Washburn, it probably was significant at least through the war years.