

Metro ski areas have sprouted up, melted away

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Ski-area watchers and users around the Twin Cities over the last 27 years may well ask themselves, what next?

Having skied off and on since the age of 6, this reporter, at the age of 38, was assigned to cover a ski area. Any one would do. There were Moon Valley, Buck Hill, Pine Bend, Norski Hill, Barkers Alps (Bayport) and a rope tow (all were rope tows) north of New Brighton.

I picked one at Dresser, Wis., with dogleg ropes zigzagging through the woods, powered by old truck motors still in body frames, mounted on timbers.

Entrepreneurs Walter Peterson and Lee Rogers, who had used a two-man saw to cut short segments of tree trunks for hasocks in the chalet, put on a name contest, and the winner was "Trollhaugen" (meaning troll hills).

Things went well, and soon a patriarch from across the St. Croix River, Arthur Rivard of Taylors Falls, Minn., was standing around watching. Rivard was a big landowner and had five sons, Kenneth, Myles, Earl, Lloyd and Letland. Among them they farmed and did a lot of retailing in Taylors Falls. At one time they had their own airport.

After observing the action at the Trollhaugen ticket booth, Rivard declared a ski area on one of his hills facing the river several miles north of town. Kenneth was put in charge. They named it "Val Croix." Things went well.

But not all that well for the area ski business in general. There was something called a "snow drought" and it lingered, off and on, for about six years.

The snow blew but thinly. It had a way of settling in a ravine where Oscar Cyr, a New England skier, and his wife, Gabe, had put in a rope tow, first for themselves and friends, then as the Pine Bend Ski Area. They did the best business around the metro area until heavier snows returned.

At the base of Buck Hill that summer I found Chuck Stone, its president, trying to clean up some wreckage around a small frame building that was then the Buck Hill chalet. He complained about summer vandalism. Later they had summer horseback riding at the area to kind of watch things. And bit by bit they added lifts, buildings and racing instruction under Austrian Erich Sailer. His wife, Ursula, a physical training teacher,



Ben Kern
your weekend

trained skiers. They're both still at it.

In the 1950s Gordy Bowen got Mount Normandale (now Hyland Hills) going in Bloomington. He was reaping a harvest mostly from the children of well-heeled skiers in that end of town—until the drought hit.

During the drought snow-making made its appearance. The first around the Twin Cities to try it was Marjorie Benedikter, who had been married to pro skier Sepp Benedikter. She's a professional ski clothes designer and an excellent skier and now lives in Colorado.

She had been running Moon Valley in the Minnesota River valley southeast of Shakopee since late in the Depression—had done some radio broadcasting about skiing, too. She said the well for her snow-making cost \$20,000. That sounded like a fortune in those days.

Other areas have come and gone—Norski became Inver Hills and now lies fallow pending real estate developments south of the Twin Cities. Englewood, an area that sprang up south of Trollhaugen, was bought up and closed by river-front land investors.

Ski Mac, founded by M.L. Macallister, became Snowcrest. New owners Bob and Carol Owens introduced Norwegian ski instructors Per Gulbrandsgaard, Einar Elvrum, Finn Haug, Stein Smith, Osbjorn Ostervoll and others to Upper Midwest skiers and added cross-country to Snowcrest's teaching



MORE THAN JUST A SKI AREA

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- Afton miles - a flexible children's ski program.
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Harold Lutton, a hard worker who bought and developed the Birch Park terrain in Wisconsin, died before he could see it blossom and flourish as it has under the Earl Nystroms and Roger Lecy. Buffalo Valley came and went.

In a Cannon River valley grocery program.

Also about that time, walking into the fields south of Afton, I saw coming over the brow of a hill a man with a visored suncap—Paul Augustine. He wasn't sure he wanted it known that he, his brother Bob and Tom Furlong were about to build a ski area. They did, though, and ran the first

lift, a poma, with a big tractor engine. Today it's Afton Alps, with 17 chairlifts.

At Interstate Park at Taylors Falls, I met a young man piloting an excursion boat and giving the spiel on a public address system. He said he spent his winters scraping rental canoes, tinkering with boat engines and fixing the wiring on automatic pinsetters in bowling alleys.


Later, at Trollhaugen, seeing how he could ski, I asked, "Why don't you get certified and teach?"

"I'm thinking about it," he said. That was Dennis Raedeke. He got

his certificate, ran the Trollhaugen Ski School, skied on the American instructors' demonstration team at the worldwide instructors' get-together, sold Rosemount boots through the mountains and bought Val Croix, which he now runs and improves as "Wild Mountain."

The Trollhaugen founders, having sold their area to Anne and Ray Rochford, are living in happy retirement. The area goes on and is still adding chairlifts.

That's only what's happened around the Twin Cities. Ski areas have sprouted up (and some have died) all over the Upper Midwest since that Trollhaugen assignment in 1950. What next?



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