

Times were when 5,000 came for jumps

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sell hot dogs, or anything else needed."

One year the club had a Central Ski Association meet with skiers from Michigan, Iowa, Minnesota and Illinois participating, on what the 1932 history of the club said "is not the one of the largest slides in the country (but) it is one of the sportiest and most spectacular." And 1932 was the year Oconomowoc held the National Speed Skating Championships on Fowler Lake.

The club even had a junior club, and built a slide for juniors with jumps of 50 and 60 feet possible. That jump was across from the senior high school on Forest Street now. "The Kecks were Rab's (Leslie) and my pupils then. We had as many as 50 kids jumping."

Devil's Hollow apparently got its name from the abrupt rise opposite the landing hill that was graded down some, and the natural amphitheater at the site. "We called it 'the dip' and a lot of good jumps by guys who didn't know the hill were ruined there," Winger said.

Winger was hurt twice in ski-related accidents. Working to build the junior jump he fell off a pole and broke his back. And when jumping in a benefit tournament for someone else who was hurt, he broke an arm.

Winger was a Class B jumper. He was on television a couple of times. "They'd show me jumping, and then

they'd bring on a Class A jumper to show how it should be done and make me look like a bum."

But Winger says his best jump was at Iron Mountain. He hit 220 feet, and finished flat on his back.

The Oconomowoc Ski Club in its prime paid for the transportation of skiers to jumps all over the midwest. "We jumped every weekend," Winger said, "and there'd be a party, but we were 25 and 26 years old then." The host club (Oconomowoc sponsored one tournament a year) housed and fed skiers that came to its tournament.

The hill record was held by Walter Bietila, 126 feet, and Bietila jumped in the Olympics in 1948.

Winger nostalgically recalls 5,000 to 6,000 people at Devil's Hollow meets. "From the top of the slide you could see cars parked back to Highway 16."

The club had its own shoulder patch, and prospered for about 30 years, but crowds dwindled as longer jumps on bigger slides came into prominence after WW II.

But Paul Stone had jumped in national championships by then. Oconomowoc skiers participated in Minneapolis, Gary, Ind. and Chicago.

And the club had furnished skiers for the Ski Troop in World War II, Bob Rentmeester among them, at Fort Carson, Colo.

But interest fell off. A quarter barrel of beer to help with the handwork to get the slide ready was no

longer an attraction. The times that skiers like Winger would come up from a fall through crusty snow "looking like a cat got at your face, and then go up and give 'er another try," became fewer.

There are a lot of people around yet who knew the Oconomowoc Ski

Club well. Winger still has minutes of meetings, old programs, mementoes, as does Leslie.

The biggest memento of them all, though, is the ski slide in the woods in the amphitheater that was known as Devil's Hollow.

Leslie and Winger reminisced; both were active in the club.

