

# 1961 SKI STEAMBOAT

DAILY PASS \$3.00 PITCHER BEER \$1.00



by **MIKE MCGIBONEY AND  
DAMIEN MITCHELL**

Long before Mt. Werner, long before Steamboat Springs was "Ski Town U.S.A.," and long before fancy outfits and fast skis, Yampa Valley claimed Storm Meadows and boasted of champagne powder and good skiing. Damien and I (Mike) wanted to explore the history of Storm Mountain to find out how the ski industry has changed in this area. In our delving research we found out Mt. Werner used to be Storm Mountain. There were only a few people, one A-frame building which housed a restaurant, a ski shop, a volunteer ski patrol, ski runs named for bears, and very inexpensive fares for skiing. Actually before the "established" ski area, in 1961-62 locals skied by walking, cross country skiing and jeeping to the top of the mountain, for the thrill of skiing down.

We spoke with Hazel Werner, Skeeter Werner, Ralph Selch and Marvin Crawford to collect data and history of Mt. Werner. We also used an old tape of John Fetcher previously recorded by past Three Wire Winter students. Ralph Selch began by telling us of the early beginnings of the ski area. "Jim Temple organized the Storm Meadows Corporation after he had made several trips over the top with the forest service. Certain people surveyed the area and looked to see if it was feasible to make a ski area. This was in 1957-58. These people went from the top of Rabbit Ears across really heavy snow in snowcats and climbing. Jim had the idea, and that got several people interested. He arranged for the buying at the bottom of the mountain and got proof (permission) from the forest service in the fall of 1958.

"Jim Temple, Merle Nash, Hank Perry and John Fetcher started in the ski area with the Storm Mountain Corporation. Jim Temple was the coordinator, and he had a number of local and out of town people to help, and anyone he could find who had money to put into the mountain. Several people did quite a bit of work out there, in exchange for stock and interest in the corporation.

"Merle's father voluntarily cleared some of the lower trails with his heavy duty equipment. No one had a lot of money at that time, so they used old and noisy equipment, old trucks and that sort of thing."

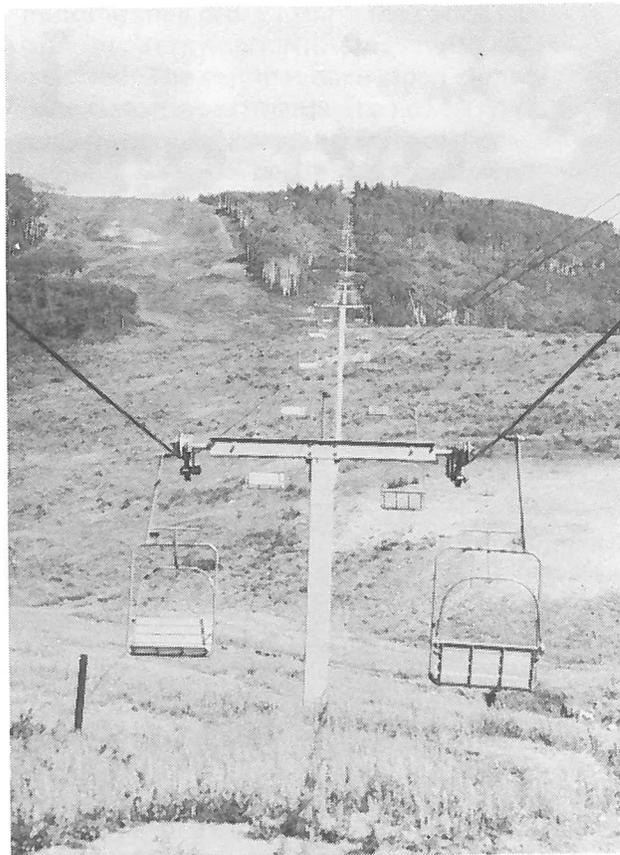


Marv Crawford told us about his involvement in the beginning of the ski area.

"I was involved with the original group with Jim Temple, and I was living in Denver at the time. I used to work with them on publicity and promotion and that type of thing. One year we had billboards all over Denver. They said, 'There is no Aspen, Ski Steamboat!' That was a lot of fun! It was a very successful campaign.

"It was very difficult financially the first few years, something like four months of revenue and twelve months of bills. Our first major loan was \$350,000 and that wouldn't even buy a chairlift now."

In the Fall of 1961 the first poma lift was installed where Headwall (the beginner's slope, known colloquially as "The Bunny Hill") is now. Then on December 22, 1961, they opened the first



### **The Christy chairlift.**

poma lift. Ralph told us, "People came out to see what was going on. Many skied on the slope of Headwall for the first time. It was a day or two after Christmas that I went into business, and I still have some records from that first day in the restaurant."

Ralph continued to tell us about how small the ski area was. "In the beginning they operated with very little money. That first year there was only the poma. At that time there was no ski patrol, only volunteer patrol. Martin Kleinsorge was the lift operator; Al King was the ski patrolman, packer, and an official maintenance



### **The "A" Frame.**

man. Taylor Brown sold tickets; Hazie and Skeeter ran the ski shop, and I had the food operation."

He went on to tell us about his restaurant and the beginning of the construction for the shopping area. "The A-frame was being built, but it wasn't finished yet. We served beer and pizza in the Bear Trap, my restaurant. Beer was a dollar a pitcher, hot dogs were fifty cents, hamburgers were seventy-five and pizzas were two twenty-five. It was a pretty popular place through the spring and summer of 1962. The Perry Mansfield kids thought it was the hottest thing between Craig and Denver. When it was new, it was really hopping out there."



## Marv Crawford, Jim Temple and John Fetcher

In 1962 John Fetcher made a trip to Long Beach where the first lift was being manufactured. He told us about that trip. "The company that was making the lift was going bankrupt. We had to pump money into them. On the 3rd of November 1962, I brought back a Ford truck with two big bullwheels for the original Christy lift. (The bullwheels are the big wheels that the cable runs across at the top and bottom.) That trip was quite an adventure. Merle Nash, Pete Wither, I and two others built the Christy lift. We opened that area in 1963, January 12.

"From then on we struggled, because running a ski business is difficult. It was four months of revenue and twelve months of bills. Our revenue was very minimal that first year. We were not a destination area, that is, an area where people come and stay. We were too far from big centers like Denver for the weekend business. We can appreciate that, and, of course, Steamboat is a small town. Then, on Saturday nights we could

walk down the middle of Lincoln Avenue not worrying about getting run over. In fact, in those days there was only one motel open. Even the Harbor Hotel was closed during the winter time."

Marv Crawford expanded the information more. "At the poma lift there were two farm- or ranch houses nearby. One of them they turned into the Gallery (a restaurant) that later became Torian's Plum. The next structure that was built was the A-frame, then another building was added later on. Then the octagon building was added, and Skeeter expanded her shop into that. The ticket office, a warming house and the A-frame was turned into a restaurant, but everything was in the A-frame at first. There was hardly anyone around when I came back to Steamboat in 1964 "

Marv continued to fill in more information for us about the business part of the ski mountain. "The original corporation was Storm Meadows, that's the one that Temple formed. Jim Temple took it as far as he could then in order to keep the thing going they had to start two more corporations, and the original Storm Mountain corporation was phased out. Winterland Engineering was the operating corporation who owned the ski area, and the Steamboat Land Corp owned the land at the base of the mountain. Ski Time Square was all part of it, so there was two new corporations. This was all before LTV. LTV actually purchased the area and the land from those two corporations. I think it was 1965 when they purchased it, and they were mostly responsible for building the gondola."





## Gondola cars since 1970.

Marv continued to talk about the development. "I was the general manager for the ski area for three years starting in 1964. During that time we built the second chair lift which went to the top of Thunderhead. At that time there was just the Christy and the poma lift. Thunderhead was then Winterland; this was before LTV. Gordy Wren replaced me as general manager from 1962 to 1969, and he worked for LTV after that, too."



## Storm Mountain in winter

Mr. Fetcher continued to talk about the beginning. "Also in those days there were no trails. We skied over these hills many times in the early sixties looking at the mountain. We were trying to decide whether it would be a good area to develop."

More information was accumulating about Ski

Town U.S.A. Ralph told us, "The next year about the first weekend in January of 1963, the Werners were set up. Their sport shop was downtown, and they had to put some merchandise in their home. I was operating the food concession stand for the meantime and working out of the base of the A-frame. When we started our business Hazie & Skeeter started their sporting goods business at the same time."



## Hazel Werner.

Hazie and Skeeter filled us in on some more details of the early development. "We had a small little ski shop with rental, retail and repair. It was at the village and up above. There was a restaurant owned by Ralph Selch below. That summer Buddy and Skeeter had spent the time getting organized with the ski shop. Then in the fall of '62 Skeeter and Buddy started the business in the A-frame, actually the ski corporation, then a little above where the old ranch was. Charles Crosby had the contract for the building; that was his contribution to get things going.



## Skeeter Werner as an Olympiad.

"I think the rental business was very small at that point. We only had 50 units, that's skis, boots and poles. Now we have pretty close to a thousand. Oh, it was very, very small. The fashions were long, laced boots and Marker

bindings. We had wooden skis, Head skis, laced boots made by Riteco, all for only five dollars a day. Skeeter and Rusty Chandler handled and ran the retail and repair and even sold the ski lift tickets."

Storm Meadows building in 1968. The first construction started in Ski Time Square in 1968, also, while they were building the Mt. Werner lodge condominiums. One of the old farmhouses burned down to the ground around then. Part of



## The Village in 1960.

Ralph filled in more information about this fashionable resort in the early days. "We didn't get too much going for the first few years. We were really just messing around out there. Mostly we stood around waiting in our long fur coats. We would be out there seven days a week, and sometimes during the week we would go skiing in untackled powder. Delby Heid helped run the shop for the first year or so for Skeeter and Buddy. When Buddy Werner was killed, Loris got involved. Delby watched after my shop when I skied, and I looked after his shop when he skied. Delby was lift supervisor for seven years and even skied on one ski."

Ralph continued, "There wasn't any development there then really. Stuart Robinson owned the Gallery which was the old farmhouse. Later Xanadu was the first condominiums and then the ski lodge was built. Marvin Crawford and Bob Day later built the Storm Meadows condominiums."

Marv enlightened us more about Storm Meadows, now one of the largest condominium projects at Mt. Werner. "We started our first

the construction crew that was working on it were living there. They had gone downtown for the night, and something happened. It was located about where the Sheraton is now. It was spring, and the fire trucks couldn't get out to it, and it just burned down."

Ralph continued, "It wasn't crowded at all, and even on a busy day there were only 300-400 people skiing. We knew everyone who skied on the mountain; people from Wyoming and Fort Collins were the only ones we didn't know. That's mostly where our out-of-towners were from.

"We used jeeps until we got the Christy lift going. There were only about two or three runs. During 1961 and '62 there was only Bear Claw and two runs on the Christy. They named the trails after a lot of bear names, like Bear Paw, Bear Claw and Bear Trap. What we call Headwall now, then they called Moby Dick. They had Bashor, and it was still called Bashor. The cat track that zig-zagged all the way down was called Yoo Hoo. Heavenly Daze was a good powder run. They've renamed a lot of the trails today, and now there are so many more runs."

Marv told us more about naming the trails. "I helped clear trails, and I helped name a lot of the trails. Some of the names were Bear Claw and Bear Paw; those were right under the Christy. Then we added Oopps! and Yoo Hoo and Vertigo. We got those names 'out of the blue.' A group got together one night to try and come up with names. It turned out that a young artist who was working for me, Ken Moore, he and I sat down one night and came up with names. We just picked them out of the air. There were some marks of bears on trees on the mountain, but we never saw any bears. The road that we took jeeps up is part of Why Not. The Thunderhead lift went up in '65; it went all the way to the top of the gondola and it was a pretty major production. It took a lot of tree trimming. That's what we did all summer and fall. The year before that we had cleared the lift line."

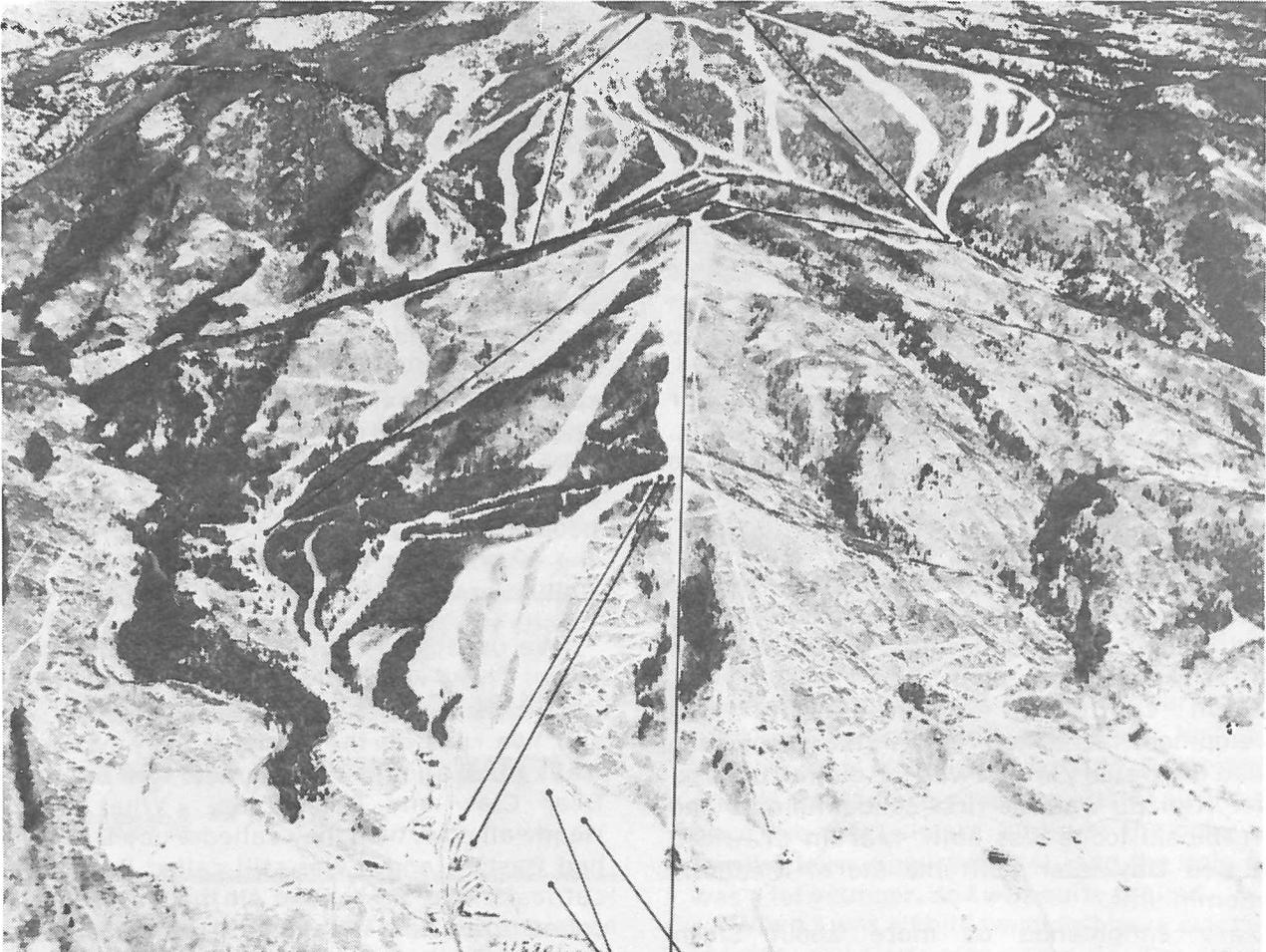
Later Ralph told us about the rates and ski passes. "Ski passes were sold that first year. The passes were seventy dollars. Ski school rates were three-fifty for a half day and five dollars for a full day. They didn't have any group rates like they do now, the three day and five day lift tickets."

In the spring of 1963 Buddy Werner, an Olympic skier from Steamboat, was killed in an

avalanche in Europe. "Gates Gooding and Bill Nash got a group of people together to change the name Storm Mountain to Mt. Werner, and later they named the library after Buddy, too. They named the mountain after him because he thought it was a good ski mountain. After that LTV (Ling Tempco Vought) purchased the mountain lease. The gondola was built in 1970. There was no problem with the gondola being built, and they wanted to expand the mountain."

As we were drawing our interviews to a close we asked each interviewee about the future of skiing in this area. Skeeter said, "I really just don't know, but I really hope it is good."

Marv replied, "Steamboat goes back a long ways, and there have been a lot of changes. Aspen was one of the other few ski areas around when Steamboat was built. It was started right after the second World War in 1945-46. Vail started about the same time as Steamboat. The ski areas that were actually in operation at that time were Winter Park, Loveland Base, Arapahoe and Aspen. Skiing was great here even though that first year we had only 200 skiers on a big weekend. I think everyone involved in the beginning ski mountain actually thought this would become one of the top ski areas in the country."



**A picture of Mount Werner**