

Howelsen Hill

Steamboat Springs, since 1915

Colorado's longest continuously operating ski area

1913 Carl Howelsen, a Norwegian ski champion and skilled stonemason (also known as Barnum and Bailey Circus' "Flying Norseman"), arrives in Steamboat Springs to host a ski jumping exhibition.

1914 Carl Howelsen organizes the first Winter Carnival on Woodchuck Hill (now the location of Colorado Mountain College), drawing 2,000 tourists to the little mountain town. He also organizes a ski club, known today as the Steamboat Springs Winter Sports Club, to educate and interest the community in the sport of skiing, ski jumping, and all other winter sports.

1914 Carl Howelsen deems the shaded slope of the hill "across the river" from downtown Steamboat Springs is an ideal location for a ski jump. His ski jump was to be built in the hill known as Crawford or Quarry Mountain (now called Emerald Mountain). Howelsen convinces the city to help him cut trees, clear the natural hill, and erect a scaffold for a world-class jump he called the "Howelsen Slide."

1915 The new ski area opens on what was once an elk refuge. At the second annual Winter Carnival in February, held for the first time at Howelsen Hill, professional ski jumper Ragnar Omtvedt sets the mark of 145 feet on Howelsen's new wooden jump.

1916 Steamboat Springs Winter Sports Club joins the National Ski Association, becoming the first Rocky Mountain ski club to join the organization.

1917 The town of Steamboat Springs renames the "Big Hill" as Howelsen Hill to honor Carl Howelsen, the ski area's founder.

1920 Howelsen Hill's first amenities are built, including a 150-seat heated grandstand, a toboggan slide, and a lighted skating rink. Carl Howelsen returns to Norway.

1921 A 100-mile-per-hour windstorm levels trees on Howelsen Hill. One of the prizes awarded to Winter Carnival's winning amateur ski jumpers is a 20-pound bucket of lard.

1931 Graeme McGowan (organizer of Colorado's first Alpine ski race in 1930) visits Howelsen Hill to teach "no-fall downhill." No one knew quite what to think.

1932 Nordic ski jumper John Steele competes at the Lake Placid Olympic Games, becoming the first athlete trained on Howelsen Hill to attend the Olympics. He is Colorado's third skier to become a member of the United States Olympic Team and is featured in Ripley's *Believe it or Not* for his daredevil schemes that inspire others to pursue Olympic dreams.

1933 Winter Carnival showcases its first slalom race. Flags are tied to willow branches all along Howelsen Hill's east face.

1934 Howelsen Hill's first lift opens – a boat-tow powered by a Ford Model A engine, effectively a sled pulled by a cable that was designed to haul up the mountain lumber and other construction materials to repair and maintain the jumps.

1935 A quarter-mile slalom course is cut on the west side of Howelsen Hill to satisfy growing interest in Alpine skiing. The top of the course is designed to start between two small evergreens; but a January 1936 article printed in the *Steamboat Pilot* reported that someone cut down one of the trees – presumably to be used for Christmas – and ruined the start gate. The first Winter Carnival Night Show, with torchlight parades and fireworks is presented on Howelsen Hill.

1936 Claudius Banks of Vernal, Utah makes his debut as "The Lighted Man" on Howelsen Hill as part of the Night Show.

1937 Night skiing is offered, initially by a spotlight atop the fire station on 9th Street. The boat-tow is relocated and extended to the top of Howelsen Hill. Powered by an electric motor, it is reconfigured as a double-reversible, or "jigback" with two sleds each carrying ten skiers 1,000 feet up the hill to the slalom courses. It would remain in service until 1970.

1940 Howelsen Hill boasts a 465-foot vertical drop, three jumps for Class A and B jumpers, and a toboggan course.

1944 Skiing becomes part of the Steamboat Springs school curriculum.

1945 A rope-tow is added on Sulphur Cave Hill to serve the beginner runs. Work begins on the base lodge; it would be completed the following year. At the close of WWII, the American Legion clears the Veterans Memorial Trail from the top of Emerald Mountain. Access is via snow-cats, crawler tractors or hiking.

1946 Howelsen Hill hosts its first National Ski Jumping Championships.

1948 The Emerald Mountain Ski Lift opens. At 8,850-feet long with a 1,440-foot rise, it is the longest single-span ski lift in America. Built in 1947, the lift is unique in that it has both chairs and T-bars, all driven by a 75-horsepower electric motor at the base. Cost of the immense tow is close to \$100,000, money that is raised by local people who buy income bonds. The fact that all ski facilities in Steamboat Springs are community owned and operated in order to provide enjoyment instead of profit attracts nationwide attention.

1949 Following the 1948-1949 ski season, the Emerald Mountain Ski Lift chairs are only used for summer sightseers with the T-bars for skier use. While the terrain off the top of Emerald Mountain was steep, it was also quite flat across the meadows with little intermediate terrain. It was not a positive skiing experience.

1950 Ski jumping on Howelsen Hill becomes a part of July Fourth festivities when 40 tons of ice shavings are sprayed on two 75-yard runs to accommodate 18 jumpers dressed in jeans and cowboy hats.

Olympian Gordon L. Wren supervises clearing of a downhill course from the summit of Emerald Mountain passed the stone quarry to terminate at River Road south of Brooklyn Addition. "Gordy" had been hired the year previous as ski instructor, coach, and manager of Howelsen Hill.

1952 The Fiery Hoop ski jumping act is added to the Winter Carnival Night Show.

1954 The "World's Longest Single-Span Ski Lift" is shortened to serve only Howelsen Hill due to inferior technology. Its cable would wear through contact with the lift's steel terminal and tower sheaves. Replacing three miles of cable every two years was a major expense for a lift that was never paid for and never paid its way.

1955 The Sulphur Cave Hill rope-tow, having served a brief stint on the slalom course (too steep for a rope-tow), is moved to the present Ponyland beginners hill. It would be replaced in 1989 by a Pony® handle-tow and in 2003 by a Magic Carpet® conveyor belt.

1956 Summer chairlift operations on Howelsen Hill are discontinued.

1970 The Poma-lift is installed, replacing the 1948 T-bar lift. The boat-tow is removed, its track taken over by the 70-meter (K-90) jump.

1972 Howelsen Hill's 90-meter jump, a.k.a. the Graham Jump, burns. Howelsen Hill is proposed as the site for the 1976 Winter Olympics' Nordic events and soon after this proposal surfaces, the jump's landing platform burns. Whether this was an accident or the action of residents concerned about the impact of hosting Olympic events is unknown. The exact cause was never determined, but it inspired a huge redesign and fundraising campaign for a sweeping renovation of the Howelsen Hill jumps. In a move that stunned the world, Colorado voters rejected the bid for the 1976 Winter Olympics.

1977 A \$1.1 million renovation of the Howelsen Hill jumps is completed, including a steel judge's tower to replace older wooden structures. The city of Steamboat Springs acquires the equipment and operation of the Howelsen complex in an agreement with the Steamboat Springs Winter Sports Club.

1983 The Renault Ice Driving School (the first of its kind in the U.S.) opens at Howelsen Hill to introduce the theory and practice safe driving on ice and snow-covered roads.

1989 A Heron-Poma double chair is installed, transplanted from the defunct Steamboat Lake ski area.

1991 The Howelsen Hill base lodge is expanded to include meeting rooms, offices and training facilities. The addition is called Olympian Hall.

1993 The roof of the newly remodeled and expanded Olympian Hall collapses. No one is hurt. It would be rebuilt.

1994 Howelsen Hill hosts its first Nordic Combined World Cup.

1996 Howelsen Ice Arena, fully enclosed, is completed.

1999 Howelsen Hill's first half-pipe is cut.

2000 The Howler opens, a summer Alpine slide designed to raise funds for Steamboat Springs Winter Sports Club.

2006 A plastic-surface ski jump at Howelsen Hill becomes the newest incarnation of the jump facility, making it a year-round training facility. Private funds leverage a state grant to finance the cost of reconstruction and the new plastic covering.

2009 An expedition of scientists discovers rare red worms inside Howelsen Hill's Sulphur Cave that live on hydrogen sulfide, similar to organisms that live in hydrothermal vents along the Pacific's mid-ocean ridge. Sulphur Cave's worms are the Earth's first hydrogen sulfide metabolizing organisms ever discovered on land.

2015 Community celebrates Howelsen Hill's 100th anniversary

Howelsen Hill Statistics

Location: Downtown Steamboat Springs

Year Opened: 1915

Owned & Operated by: The City of Steamboat Springs

Elevations: Summit.....7,136 feet

Base.....6,696 feet

Vertical Rise.....440 feet

Skiable Terrain: Alpine, 50 acres; Nordic 150 acres

Longest Run: 1 mile

Snowmaking: 50%

Trail System: 15 alpine trails, 3 lifts; 20 kilometers of cross-country trails

Trail Classification: 25% beginner, 2% intermediate, 55% advanced

Terrain Parks: Half-pipe; skateboard park (open year-round weather permitting)

Jumping facilities: K114, K90, K60, K38, K25, K18

Snowfall: 150 inches

Quote: When Norwegian ski jumper and stone mason Carl Howelsen arrived in Steamboat Springs in 1913, he knew he had found a very special place. "The snow here is light and dry and splendid for traveling." – Carl Howelsen