

Viewpoints

Ogden's first ski competition

I moved to Utah almost 30 years ago. A few days after arriving, a colleague took me camping in the Unita mountains. We pitched tents in shirt-sleeve temperatures. The next morning we woke up to find frost on the ground and a snow line about 800 vertical feet above our tents.

As I drank my coffee, I watched successive banks of clouds roll over the snow covered mountain tops and thought I was close to paradise. Each successive fall, I have awaited the arrival of the first snow on the mountain tops to the north and east of Ogden.

As I sit on my front porch and watch the snow line move down the mountain I begin to think about ski season. I start checking my gear and contemplating days on the slopes.

Fellow Utahns have anxiously awaited the start of ski seasons for decades. The Winter Olympics first took place in 1924 in Chamonix, France. An 11-year-old figure skater named Sonja Henie caught the attention of the world, and the Winter Olympics games ignited an interest in winter sports in the United States.

Following the 1924 games, there was particular excitement about skiing and ski jumping. Local ski tournaments began to spring up around the country. Ogden was one of the early communities to catch the ski fever.

Just one year after the first Winter Olympics, the Ogden Rotary Club decided to host a ski tournament. After several days of scouting for a suitable location, the decision was made to hold the competition on Ogden's east bench. Spectators and competitors were instructed to make their way to the east end of 24th street, then hike half a mile to the north.

The event was held at 11 a.m. on Saturday, Jan. 10, 1925. The Ogden Standard described the venue as a "scene of Switzerland" as snow fell on the 200 spectators during much of the tournament.

Competitive events included a 220 yard "straight-away" race, a distance race, a hill climb and a ski jump. Prizes were donated by the Fred M. Nye Company, Shupe Williams Candy Company, the Ogden-Utah Knitting Store and others.

Commentary



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consider that women were not allowed to compete in any Olympic ski events until 1936, and even today, women cannot compete in the ski jumping events.

The first Ogden ski tourney was won by Fred Stecher who was judged to be the "best all around ski artist on the hill." Others won prizes in the individual events.

The Rotarians had an inspired vision of Ogden's potential to host competitive skiing events. In subsequent years, Ogdenites moved the ski competition to Becker hill and ski jumpers from across the country came to compete. Seventy-seven years later, Snowbasin would host the world's best alpine skiers during the 2002 Winter Olympics.

I spend most of my ski days at Snowbasin with a few diversions to Snowbird and Park City for a little variety. On at least one day this year, I plan to walk to the east end of 24th Street, put on my nordic skis and head half a mile to the north. It will be interesting to visit the venue of Ogden's first ski competition.

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