

Does She Ski, Skid? Shush, I'm Shur Shoused!

The Swooping Thrills Of Alpine Sport Has Captured West Coast Enthusiasts



By Judith Wales

WHEN the hunting season is over and the echoes of football have died away, the West Coast doesn't just sit and twiddle its thumbs. Instead, it waxes its skis and takes to the snowfields. About the first of December begins the great caravan back into the mountains. From the misty forests of the Northwest to the sunny orchards of California, it moves along Cars, special busses, snow trains, all bristling with skis like a Viking conquest, wind their way up grades and through heavily timbered avenues into a land of enchantment. There, until the middle of May, and in some sections even into July, the mountain slopes reverberate with the gaily and enthusiasm of thousands as they skim like birds down the swift terrains, or flounder on their backs in a hopeless but good natured scramble of their under-pinnings.

In the lodges, inns, and cabins that nestle among the trees, there is the clank of wood and the tramp of heavy shoes. At night, glowing fires and the best of companionship make pleasant end of the healthily robust days. Ski clubs have grown apace; have chartered courses and provided them with instructors. The United States Forest Service, in sympathy with the wholesome pull toward the snowfields, has rallied like a big brother everywhere, and has cleared terrains, modified hills, and scooped out bowls that the country may have its fun. It has helped make possible ski trips of several days, by means of a net work of trails dotted with snug, well provisioned cabins where one may bunk before a fire and then fall away to the soundless slumber of the mountains.

Railroads and bus lines have plowed through primitive areas seeking the best terrains, and manufacturers, with their ears to the ground, have learned to turn out equipment that a few years ago could be had nowhere this side of Europe. The most discriminating may now go forth attired in the smartest of toggery, with a local trade mark. Business is thankful for skiing, for statistics inform us that it does more for the money coffers than even golf, which has long been the fair haired child.

AND all this in a very few years. For we can remember a little while back when youngsters whittled out some crude boards, daubed them with bee's wax fished from their mother's pantries and disported themselves on the hills back of town. Now and then some grown up lover of the out of doors would dare to join them, but for the most part the mature remained below to balance their bank books. A pair of skis strapped to the running board of a car was as wild and curious a sight as a fresh slain bear brought in by some intrepid hunter. So the snow fields were left largely to reckless youngsters and the Laplanders.

It was a little more than a dozen years ago that the first pair of skis made their slender and hesitant tracks on Mt. Rainier, in western Washington, but a few hours from both Tacoma and Seattle. But so fast has the sport taken hold and developed that last winter from Seattle alone five contestants, two men and three women, products of the slopes of that majestic old mountain, were sent to the XI Olympic Winter Games at Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, in the Bavarian Alps. There, in the most thrilling experience of their lives, in the midst of superb winter pageantry, they competed with the best in the world. And we are told by one who observed them, that they compared well with Europeans who have been racing down mountain slopes almost since they could stand on their two legs.

Each year in January cruises go out from the East coast, cross the ocean, and trek up into the Austrian Tyrol that lovers of the sport may en-

(Above) Executing a turn at high speed on the slopes of Mt. Baker, Washington. (Below) For sheer beauty of sport nothing excels the sight of one who takes off from the lip of a hill and soars to a poised landing in a shower of blinding snow. Has Graze in a jump at Mt. Rainier.



A sweeping view of one of the long open fields for which Mt. Hood in Oregon is noted.



Joy swooping down those slippery peaks. There, at Sankt Anton, they may attend the famous school of Herr Hannes Schneider, said to be the most expert skiing instructor in the world, and proud of the reputation that no one has ever been hurt in his classes. There, with other devotees of the snowfields, from every nation, they tour through superbly picturesque country and live at quaint villages, where even the help at the inns, and stocky blacksmiths fly down the slopes like winged Mercuries.

Londoners brave the dreaded winter Channel crossing and the long trip through France with its poor accommodations, just for a few exhilarating rides down the Alps. Africa, Australia, New Zealand, all profess a growing devotion to the terrains. And Japan, known as the land of cherry blossoms, has turned with enthusiasm to the snow.

Why then, all this fervor for skiing? Is it just a fad of the moment? So we hid ourselves around to see.

IF THERE is anything a skier likes to talk about, it is skiing. Ask any of those, man or woman, who have ever flown like magic down the slopes of a mountain side and they will tell you it is the king of sports. It is strange how that intimacy with the lofty mysteries sets them apart with an air of confidence and poise. Their faces will light up as they ascend the imaginary heights again. They will forget the dull accounts they are pouring over, the knotty brief they are wrestling with, and the irate customer waiting outside. They will take you along snowy terrains into a world of clean white beauty and intoxicating freshness. They will make you feel the exhilaration and wonder of it as they skim along like a bird exulting in the skill of the human body.

Skiing, all agree, is an amateur sport in the strictest sense of the word. Those who take to it do so for the pure pleasure it gives. And even though there is spectacular performance that delights great throngs, the greatest delight still remains with the performer and his achievement. For that reason, the sportsmanship runs high, and an indefinable quality of friendship distinguishes those groups which for a common love of the snow have been brought together.

Around their great fires at night there is good talk. There are tips on trails and things to do; there is an exchange of wax and help with a stubborn binding as men and women mix in wholesome camaraderie. No more friendly sportsmen ever lived than those who have taken the mountain tops for their province.

Even the most expert, unjealous of his love, will tell you that anyone who wants to can have fun on skis. It takes some confidence, physical balance, and a sense of humor which helps to unscramble our under-pinnings when we get the spills that are sure to come. And no quibbling at the climb back up which tests heart and lungs, for skiing is a down hill sport. Then one learns to stand, and, what is more important, to stop, in case a mountain or something gets in the way. Next, he may learn to turn and climb.

After that he understands why the world has taken to its upper slopes.

BUT, of course, to become highly skilful, takes many years of arduous practice, and a knowledge of snow craft and mountaineering, for the wise take no chances. Not until then may one hope to whizz down the long terrains at 60 miles an hour and swerve away from the tree or boulder that suddenly rises up to confront him; or run the dizzy, zigzag down hill Slalom race; or to let loose and sail over the crest of a hill. For jumping is the most dangerous and spectacular of all skiing. In the sheer beauty of sport, nothing excels the sight of one who takes off from the lip of a hill and soars through the air with exquisite poise and lands 150 feet beyond in a shower of scudding snow. The longest jumps go close to 200 feet, although there are a few records of more than 250. The United States and Norway are given almost the entire credit of developing the jump.

According to those who know, skis should be long enough to touch the cup of the hand held straight overhead. The best are of hickory, light and tough, although other woods are used. Recently it has been discovered that plywood, a product of the Northwest, is extremely satisfactory. Then, a pair of light poles, a quantity of wax (always wax) and one is ready to be off to the most refreshing and rejuvenating sport he has ever known, where he may even wrestle with a blizzard and have no fear.

SKING is as old as the hills themselves. As far back as 3000 years ago, Xenophon, famed Greek historian, wrote of a trip to Asia Minor where he saw horses trotting easily over soft snow by means of light disks attached to their hoofs. And Procopius, Byzantine chronicler, told tales of strange people far to the North, named "Skrid-Finnar", or "sliders". No doubt, long before the Christian era, skis were the main means of transportation for the Finns and Laps, and there is the story of an early Swedish king who used them to flee his country when in danger. England has been "skoeing" as it is called there, for more than 300 years, and as a result of the more recent popularity, has one of the largest ski clubs in the world.

Wherever snow conditions have made ordinary transportation impossible, the slick woods have been put into use. Hunters, trappers, mail carriers, explorers, and armies have found them indispensable. In Russia there is a record of a march made by troops from Finland in full marching order, and in only 29 days. As early as 1710, Norway and Sweden equipped their armed forces with them, and in 1902 France and Italy put their first soldiers aboard them, high in the Alps. They were a definite part of the Amundsen and Byrd expeditions, and recently, when the National Geographic Society sent a group to explore and map the rugged mountains of the Yukon, it was accomplished largely on skis. In all the Scandinavian countries, parts of Canada and the United States, and even across the high Andes between Chile and Argentina, mails skim over the snows by means of swift runners, usually Norwegian.

But it seems that man does not always know

when he is having fun, for it was not until the winter of 1860, in Telemark, Norway, that skiing was first taken up as a sport. And not until so recent as 1883 was the first pair taken into Switzerland. Those were a gift to a monk in a high Alpine monastery. Being a wise monk, he learned to use them well, as did others of that monastery, and from that modest beginning did Switzerland grow to be one of the most famous skiing centers in the world.

IN THE United States it did not begin to take any hold until 1910, and it was long after that before it had any general following, through the East and the New England states, little knots of true sportsmen paid it homage. It came to the Pacific Coast slowly, for it is hard to connect winter sports with a land where the whole year round there are flowering orchards, sunshine, feathery mists, and dripping ferns. So it was well into the 1920's before a few enthusiasts began trying the "hickory slabs." Others followed exuberantly. Winter seasons in the mountains began to grow. Boarded up inns and lodges opened again, brushed down the cob webs, and restocked. Stacks of wood began to be piled around summer cottages, and a sack of potatoes left in the kitchen for later use. Roads have been built in, and trains have changed their schedules.

Now, in all accessible snow regions of the Coast, the winter season exceeds that of the summer. Christmas and New Year with snow on the window sills and icicles hanging from the eaves bring joy to countless thousands who annually look forward to that respite from a hectic life. Business men toil into the back country to wrestle with the majesty of the elements, and come down refreshed. Whole families burrow into snow submerged cabins to enjoy the peace and relaxation the winter stillness gives.

Because of the loftiness of the peaks and the nearness to the ocean, the precipitation along the Coast is heavy, thereby making a deep and lasting snow. This is particularly true of the Northwest where on Mt. Rainier and Mt. Baker it reaches an average depth of 18 to 21 feet. Switzerland itself can boast of only 7. And the Pacific slope is blessed with a season as long as any in the world. For in some sections it begins as early as the last of November or first of December. For several months then, one can look forward to the beloved "powder," that fine, dry snow that is the hope and joy of every devotee of the sport. A hard crust, and a few inches of fresh fall on top—that is all one could ask for a glorious day of living.

Then in March and April comes the spring season, when the more skilful don their sun suits and a protective cream and mount to the higher levels. With every week-end they go up and up until, in May and June and even into July, bronzed bodies race about like elves in the vast expanses that lie between glaciers as high as 11,000 feet. Spring skiing is one of the most thrilling experiences of the sport. For when the average man is digging fishing worms, winding up his pitching arm, or oiling his golf clubs, the ski forward lifts his eyes and considers the mountains. With a new supply of wax and the faithful old bindings he will rise at 3 a. m. and

ride forth into the rapturous dawn of birds and blossoming orchards. Then he will ascend far up into the freshness of the snow slopes, and there in an earthly paradise, unused save by a few mortals, he will fly along the slopes like the gods themselves. And return to his task refreshed in body and spirit.

If it is Coast skiing one wants, he may take his choice. Beginning at the South, way down in lower California, there is Old Baldy which rears up above the orange groves and entices pleasure seekers to its friendly sides all winter. Made readily accessible now, too. At famous Yosemite National Park, which is said by discriminating Europeans to compare favorably with the Alps, up until as late as the season lasts, there is an elaborate program, with efficient instruction. Everything in convenience and accommodations may be had, including an Up-Ski lift on one of its runs which saves legs and lungs.

THE lover of the big trees may go to Sequoia National Park, setting of the famous moving picture "Sequoia." There, in a cottage tucked in a snow drift, and with a pair of swift runners, one may live like a Viking. Mt. Shasta, to the north, prouder of her 14,000 feet, spreads out swift and sporty terrains, and fosters tall tales of wild experiences down her slopes of long glaciers and yawning crevasses. Mystical Mt. Lassen stretches out gentle inclines that last out the day and stamina for one who runs them. And to her north, one may find the tearing blizzard he has been longing for. In the Tahoe country, toward the east, any week-end will find the hill sides alive with gaiety.

Up the coast to Oregon, and there is lovely Mt. Hood, only one hour from Portland. Long, swift terrains of several miles, jumping hills, and Ski-Bowl, good for much hilarity. Last June, the Cascade Ski Club dared to stage the first mid summer ski tournament in the United States, along with the Portland Rose Festival. In Washington, all winter activities center at Mt. Rainier, that majestic 14,000-foot peak beloved by the Indians as "The Mountain That Was God." It was there skiing history was made in the Northwest, and there on every week-end gather thousands to enjoy its Alpine-like terrains and its festivities. The best jumping in Washington is at Snoqualmie Pass, close to both Seattle and Tacoma, and to the east of the state are Cle Elum, Leavenworth, Wenatchee, the big apple country, where a delightful net work of week-end trips is always in the making. At Wenatchee, one may go up into the hills in an airplane to which have been attached skis, and once atop, he may slide down again all the way to the airport. Yes, that is really true. Farthest to the north Mt. Baker, as yet mostly unexplored, with her sweeping sides and rugged beauty, invites those who want the world more to themselves. Also, to cheer hearts and legs, a Ski-Escalator will tote you up and deposit you at the summit all fresh for another swoop down. It was in the picturesque setting of Mt. Baker that "The Call of the Wild" was filmed.

And we could go on and on, for we have developed the boundless enthusiasm of the incurable skier, that thing which causes the mountain slopes of the whole world to reverberate with wholesome happiness from beginning to end of winter. But the reason for it all is best summed up by the remark of one who has flown some of the best courses of Europe and heard him applaud of the throngs. When we looked him right in the eye and said, "What do you enjoy most about it?" he, without the slightest hesitancy, and with that expression of those who get to the higher levels, answered back forthrightly.

"After all, when the contests are over, when the trophies are hung up, the greatest pleasure of skiing is simply touring through the enchantment of the mountains; to experience the majesty, the awe, the tenderness of their moods; to stretch the soul in their quiet beauty, and to exult in the invigorating air and exercise. That alone is enough."