

**HISTORY OF PROFESSIONAL SKI PATROLLING IN THE
WESTERN UNITED STATES**

by

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As ski areas became more and more popular during the 1940's and 1950's, ski area management became increasingly aware of the need for full-time, well-trained people to tend with the daily needs of ski area operations. Avalanche control, lift evacuation, first-aid and injury evacuation were needed on a daily basis, not just on a volunteer, weekends and holidays basis. Hence the advent of Professional Ski Patrolling.

Professional Ski Patrolling is an officially recognized occupation in the eyes of the Federal Government. This will make all of the pros in the United States breath a sigh of relief I'm sure. The Federal Government in the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT) 1991 defines the duties of Ski Patroller, occupation number 379.664-010 (Amusement and Recreation), as:

"Patrols ski trails and slope areas to provide assistance and protection to skiers and report condition of trails, ski lifts, and snow cover on slopes: Patrols assigned areas, using skis or snowshoes. Rescues injured skiers and renders first aid or transfers them to waiting ambulance, using toboggan. Notifies medical personnel in case of serious injury where moving skier might prove dangerous. Ensures that no skiers remain on slopes or trails at end of day or during inclement weather. Inspects ski lifts, such as rope tows, T-bars, J-bars, and chair lifts to

report safety hazards and evidence of damage or wear. May pack snow on slopes. May give ski instruction. May participate in skiing demonstrations for entertainment of resort guests. May assist demolition crew to blast for avalanche control."

This definition also lists strength requirements for ski patrollers: exerts 50 to 100 pounds of force occasionally, and or 25 to 50 pounds of force frequently.

Nick Logan, a professional patroller for 20 years at Breckenridge and currently the Associate Director of the Colorado Avalanche Information Center, stated it simply, "There are paid patrollers and there are pro patrollers." For this paper, however, the difference between paid and professional will not be debated. The bylaws of the Professional Division of the National Ski Patrol, Professional Division, define requirements for a professional ski patroller. For now that will suffice. We can be certain, though, that many aspects of professional patrolling have changed since 1936.

The history of the National Ski Patrol is well documented from the days of Minnie Dole back in March of 1938 (Over, 1994), but to the author's knowledge no history of the "Professional Patrol" has been documented.

The National Ski Patrol and professional ski patrols joined together in a pilot program for the 1984-85 season. Sixty-five ski areas in the United States belong to this Professional Division program. Those ski areas have 2,700 pro patrollers (Over, 1994). Before this time, information on names of original pro patrollers and their initial year of work for the older ski

areas is generally limited to word-of-mouth and personal recollection by some of the pioneers of the ski industry. For ski areas begun during the 1960's or later, personnel offices generally have information on original pro patrollers.

In Colorado the first pro patroller appears to have been Lenny Woods at Aspen (currently living in Switzerland) in 1947 or George Engle at Winter Park at about the same time. At this time George Engle's whereabouts are unknown to verify a certain date. Kurt Chase had been selected to work as a pro patroller at Aspen before Lenny Woods, but broke his leg before he could start so Lenny filled the spot (Clausen, 1994).

George Engle: "I came up to Winter Park. I ran into some people, and they found out I could ski, and they needed a patrolman. They were dependent upon just a small group, the beginning of the National Ski Patrol--the Denver Branch. There were just a few guys in it, but they only came on Saturdays and Sundays and sometimes not then. So, I was hired to be the first paid ski patrol. I didn't ask how much it paid or anything. I went back to Denver and packed up my gear and went into the office and said, 'I quit.' I was making probably \$200-\$250 a week, and I moved to Winter Park for \$5 a day and never regretted it. It's a great life. It was fun, and it was tough going in those days, but it was worth it, never a question." (Richards, 1992)

In 1932 Berthoud Pass Ski Area opened with its first rope tow. Thirteen years later Bud Day and his wife Skip worked a variety of jobs at Berthoud Pass, (ski instructors, trail

maintenance, lifts, etc.) They were also asked to evacuate injured skiers from the slopes. This was around 1945 or 1946 according to Chuck Shobeinger (1994), a long-time member of the NSPS who worked Berthoud Pass on weekends. Neither Bud nor Skip were hired strictly as pro patrollers though.

Arapahoe Basin in Summit County was one of the first ski areas to open in Colorado in 1946-1947. Approximately 1,200 skiers used the rope tow that was installed during the summer of 1946. Not much need for a professional ski patrol with one rope tow and 1,200 skiers. By 1947-1948, 13,033 skiers had used A-Basin, and a ski patrol-first aid building had been built at the base area as well. The Annual Report for 1948-1949 had this paragraph on the ski patrol:

Ski Patrol and Accidents

The Arapahoe Basin Ski Patrol, under the direction of Chuck Reich, a Colorado University student, proved gratifying successful. The total number of man-days put in by this semi-paid patrol was 304. Members were paid either in free tickets or they received the price of a ticket in cash. The careful attention to duty and the vast amount of trail-packing they put in more than compensated for the expense.

Total number of accidents this season	139
Serious accidents	69
Trivial accidents	70
% of accidents to attendance	1%

The ski patrol expense for the 1948-1949 season was \$649.74, but the ski patrol also earned \$162.72. Not quite sure how the

ski patrol earned money for the ski area.

The Annual Report for 1949-1950 had some interesting facts. The ski patrollers made \$3.00 a day, from six to eight patrollers per weekend. During the season there were 162 accidents, 51 of which were fractures, dislocations or other serious wounds. The accident rate was .87% It was felt the greatest number of accidents were caused by being out of control. Some things never change. One of the high-lights of the season was the night rescue by the ski patrol of two mountain climbers on January 29.

The first report of ski patrollers performing an avalanche rescue at A-Basin occurred on November 17, 1951. During the afternoon of the 17th, 29-year-old George Bakalyar of Denver skied into a closed area on 'Slalom Slope' and triggered a slide. He was found alive by "spectators" and ski patrollers as he had one hand sticking up out of the debris. Avalanche control during the early years at A-Basin was mainly experimental, and generally performed by United States Forest Service Snow Rangers, mainly under the supervision of Paul Hauk with at the least psychological help from Monty Atwater in Alta and Dick Stillman from Berthoud Pass. (Hauk, 1979)

Alta, Utah, first opened for lift skiing in the late 1930's. The first pros weren't hired until the early 1950's according to Ed LaChapelle (1994). Two pros were hired at Alta at that time-- Warren Baldsiefen and Eddie Dreus. Ed LaChapelle said that National Ski Patrollers worked there as well but were not allowed to use explosives. Before pros were hired, avalanche control using explosives was performed by Snow Rangers from the United

States Forest Service.

Mt. Hood Meadows in Oregon hired their first pro in 1970-- Mike Gehrman. The Mt. Hood ski patrol first began in 1936. This would place them as one of the earliest in the western United States, but I haven't been able to determine if anyone had been hired as a pro patroller before 1970.

Sun Valley, Idaho, was the first destination resort developed in the United States. It was built by Averell Harriman in the Ketchum/Sun Valley location due to the proximity of the Union Pacific Railroad, of which Mr. Harriman was a part owner. Three pro patrollers were hired when they first opened--Eusebio Arriga, Boise, Idaho; George Rathke, Hailey, Idaho; and Don Marberg, Mount Clair, N.J. According to Eusebio Arriga (1994), the first pro hired at Sun Valley, the first chair lift in the United States was built on Dollar Mountain. I have yet to find out the original lift evacuation procedures. Eusebio also said room and board were furnished with some small pay. After World War II, 18-24 patrollers were staffed. The jobs for the patrollers at Sun Valley were maintenance and injury treatment.

Jackson Hole, Wyoming, first opened in 1965 with nine pro patrollers, two of whom are still working at Jackson--Dean Moore and John Bernadyn. Frank Ewing a full time resident of Jackson Hole was the first patrol director. Advanced First Aid and knowledge in avalanche control and mountaineering skills were a plus for the guys who were making \$2.00 an hour to start, with a raise to \$2.10 an hour after one month. Most of these guys had previous experience from Vail, Alta or Alpine Meadows. The

patrollers and their families all received a lift pass as well. Dean Moore (1994), the current Patrol Director at Jackson, provided a list of the names of the first 10 pros at Jackson, quite an impressive list: Will Bassett, Harry Frishman, Juris Krisjansons, Peter Lev, Rod Newcomb, Dick Pearsons, and Bob Sealander, as well as Ewing, Moore, and Bernadyn.

I am still looking for more information on this subject. Anyone that has something that would be of interest please contact me at:

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