



Skiing in Humboldt

Mapping an Alpine Legacy

This map showcases key locations that were instrumental in shaping the local skiing community. Explore the iconic sites, from the early days at New Prairie to the bustling slopes of Horse Mountain. Follow the trails, discover the lodges, and see where the dedicated skiers of Humboldt County carved their way through history.

1 Berry Summit Area 1930s to early 1950s

At 2,850 feet near Highway 299 and Titlow Hill Road in Humboldt County, Berry Summit was a skiing hub. Skiers used a portable rope tow driven by a wheel attached to the drive axle of a vehicle.



2 New Prairie 1948 - 1959

Sitting at 4,000 feet, just a quarter mile east of Titlow Hill Road at milepost 2. Operated by Humboldt Ski Club, two gas-engine powered rope tows transported skiers up the northeast-facing slope. Skiers hiked the last quarter mile uphill to reach the tows. The site included a warming lodge and hosted periodic races.

3 Diamond Prairie 1939 - 1941

Roughly 3100 feet in elevation and 2.2 miles south of Berry Summit, Diamond Prairie was a briefly operated ski area featuring a portable rope tow.

4 Humboldt State College Ski Club 1939 - 1960

At 4,000 feet, .7 miles south of New Prairie turnoff, this college-owned area featured a small lodge, designed by William Lanphere, and a vehicle-powered portable rope tow. The lodge was often full of students during the weekends.



5 Horse Mountain 1948 - 1984

At 4,951 feet, Boy Scout Explorer Post #180 initially built a cabin for summer use, later used for skiing. In the mid-1950s, the Cedar Creek Lodge Association added a lodge and gas rope tow. Humboldt Ski Club managed the area from 1959 to 1965, adding multiple rope tows. Dr. Jack Walsh, from 1965 to 1982, upgraded it with a two-story lodge, electric rope tows, and a Ski Patrol A-frame. Gary Wing maintained the site and offered lessons from 1982 to 1984.

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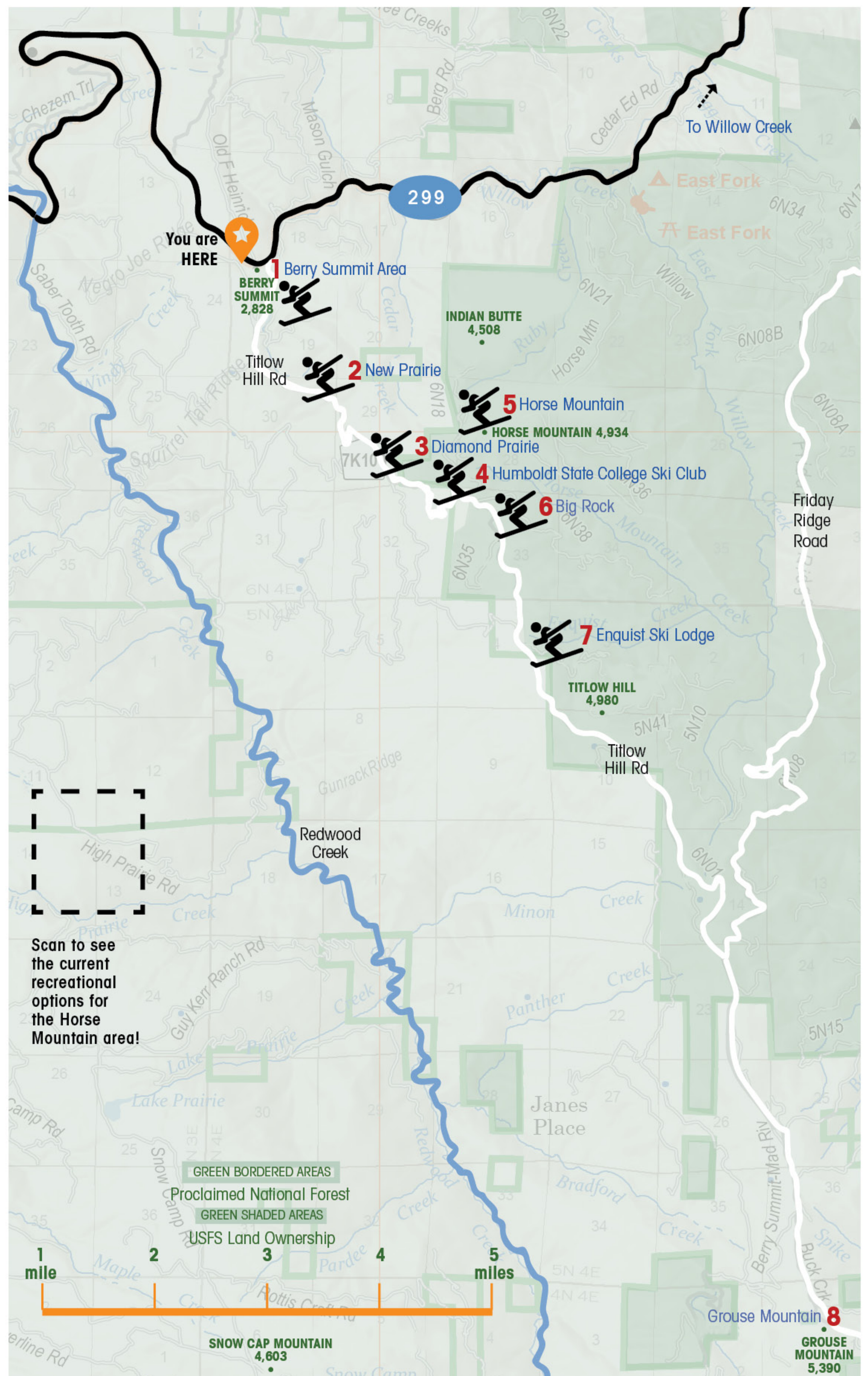
6 Big Rock 1954 - 1959

At 4720 feet, Big Rock was considered by Humboldt Ski Club a venture to more certain snow conditions, during its brief period of operation. Located at the upper copper mine area and occasionally operated with a portable tow rope.



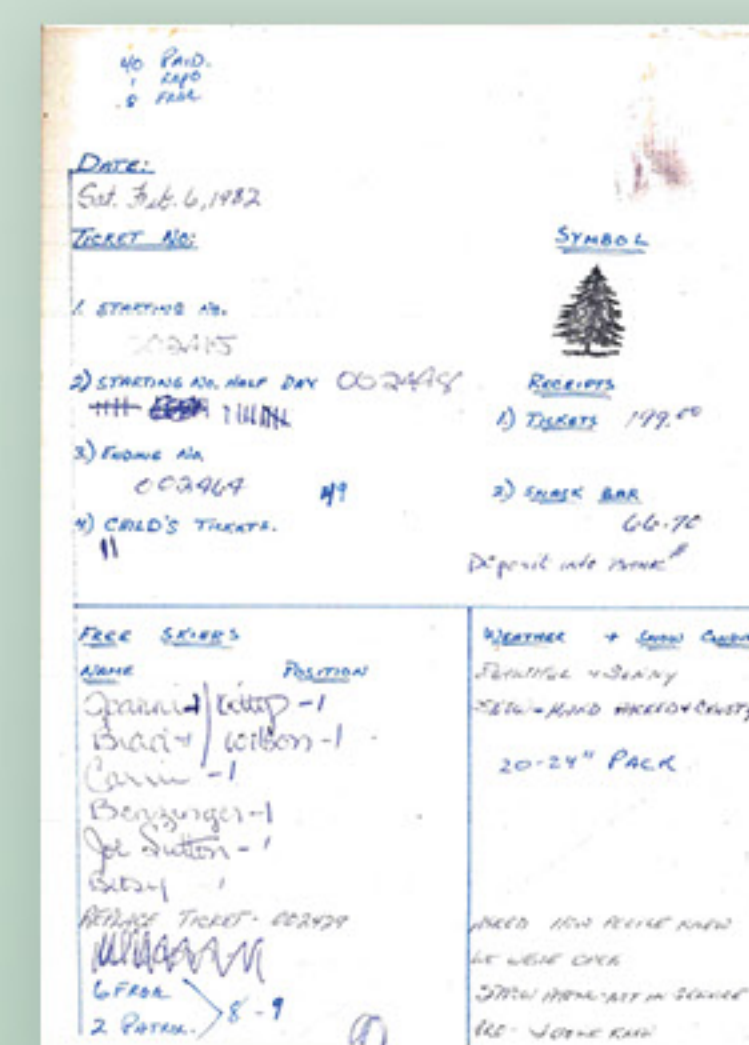
7 Enquist Ski Lodge Mid 1930s - early 1950s

Around 4650 feet elevation, known for its difficult access and the use of a snowcat for transportation from snow line to ski area, the two-story Lodge was equipped with small sleeping rooms and was powered by a generator.



1936 - 1983

own blankets. On the
are private rooms for women and
downstairs are bunks for men.
There is a large dining room; the
building is equipped with lights
and hot and cold water.



Downhill & On Duty

Adventures of the Ski Patrol



The history of the ski patrol at Horse Mountain is a testament to the dedication and camaraderie of its members. The patrol, which included figures like Gordon Hart, Ralph Kraus, Ray Jerland, Weldon Benzinger, Frank Kutil, Alan Battle, Dale McGrew, Jack Walsh, Wendell Cole, Brice Papini, Ron Wilson, Paul Jerland, Heidi and Edith Kraus, Roger Tinkey, Martin Lenz, and many others, played a crucial role in maintaining the safety of skiers.

Guardians of the Slopes

These patrollers were trained to handle emergencies with wooden rescue sleds called Tod-Boggans, the Norwegian Akja sled and the more modern fiber glass Cascade sled ensuring the well-being of every skier. Their expertise was recognized across the West, with some members also serving at prominent ski areas like Mt. Shasta, Lassen, Ashland and Bachelor.

Ski Patroller Ralph Kraus poses with another skier next to sign "Stay to left at bottom. Avoid ice. Dangerous."

Below right: Martin Lenz, Ralph Kraus and Eric Lenz

Below Left: Ski Patrol Cabin circa 1969 Brice Papini (and son Kenny) on Ski Patrol Duty on Mt. Lassen



Akja Rescue Sled

Skiing the sled downhill was easy, but to bring people back up the hill, rescuers had to stand between the front handles and strap the sled to their bodies so they'd have their hands free to hold the gripper.

— Ralph Kraus



National Ski Patrol Ski Accident Report for John Walsh dated January 1972, signed by Ralph Kraus



Ralph Kraus & Ray Jerland attend to injured skier on Beginner's Hill, circa late 1960s

Ray Jerland & Ralph Kraus, Beginner's Hill Akja loaded with rescue supplies

Rescue in Peril

Winter weather could be treacherous and fast-changing, and people sometimes got lost. The Ski Patrol assisted the Sheriff's Department during snow searches.

Their first search was in Del Norte County on Red Mountain. Two television techs went up to service the repeater towers during a snowstorm. The snowfall was so heavy that they walked right between the buildings and got lost. When the Ski Patrol volunteered to help in the search, the Sheriff said, "Skis! We can't even stand up on snowshoes!"

Despite the efforts of the searchers, the techs' bodies were buried under the snow, and weren't found until the following summer.

Humboldt Ski Club Planning Patrol
Humboldt Ski Club is planning formation of a ski patrol under the direction of Gordon Hart, former Oregon Cascade ski expert. Interested persons with first aid and ski experience are invited to attend an informal meeting at the Melvin Pinkham residence, 15th and St streets, at 7:30 p. m. next Tuesday.
Members of the Humboldt Ski Club were informed that the New Prairie area was in readiness, awaiting adequate snow conditions. Two rope ski tows have been installed, the area cleared of brush and other obstacles, and the warming cabin is available to skiers.
New Prairie is located approximately 3 miles south of Berry's Summit off 20th on U. S. Forest Service property. The Humboldt Ski Club will provide news and radio postcarders weekend news reports for the Humboldt area.
President of the club is Les Larson with Jack Walsh as vice-president, Georgina Blasioli as secretary and Mrs. Melvin Pinkham as treasurer.
The club meets the first Monday of every month.

Times Standard, January 7, 1954
Humboldt Ski Club Planning Patrol Article



Scan me to watch interview with—

WALSH ERA

Building a Ski Legacy



Dr. Jack Walsh, 80 years old, catching air

DR. WALSH DIDN'T JUST UPGRADE THE SKI AREA; HE CARVED HIS OWN PATH DOWN THE SLOPES, CATCHING AIR AND LEAVING FELLOW SKIERS IN AWE. HIS PASSION FOR SKIING WAS EVIDENT IN EVERY ASPECT OF HIS WORK.



The Walsh family, led by Dr. Jack Walsh and his wife Mary, transformed Horse Mountain into a bustling ski destination from 1965 to the early 1980s.

Dr. Walsh, a Eureka native and General Physician, took the reins of the Horse Mountain Ski Area in 1965, bringing his passion for skiing and love for the community. With Mary by his side, they expanded the facilities, adding multiple rope tows, including the daring Ruby Creek rope tow, and a new lodge. Their dedication created a welcoming environment, often bringing neighborhood children along for ski trips in their van.



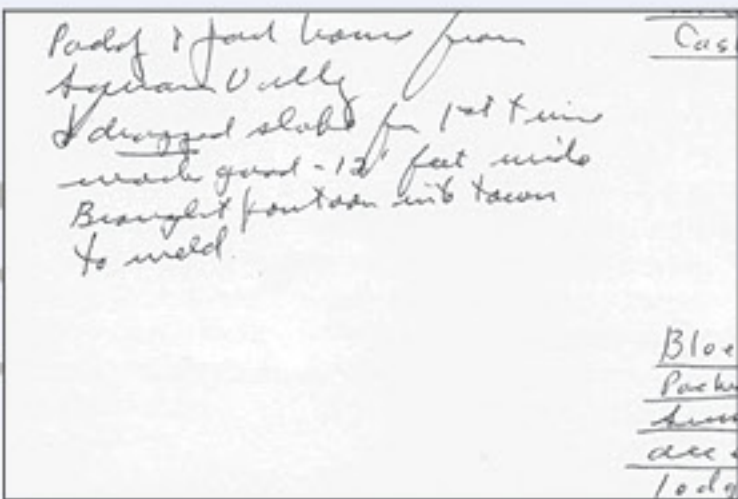
Dr. Jack Walsh, Lodge Hill Tow Shack, circa 1971

A Lifelong Passion for Skiing

Remarkably, Dr. Walsh built his own first pair of wooden skis, boiling the tips in his mom's laundry tub to shape them. This ingenuity and hands-on approach were hallmarks of his character, reflecting his deep connection to the sport. Dr. Walsh continued skiing until the age of 95, embodying the spirit and enthusiasm that made him a true skiing legend.



Rough sketch of Horse Mountain ski area, drawn by Jack Walsh, circa 1965



Daily operations report, written by Dr. Jack Walsh. Circa late 1960s

Matriarch of the Mountain

Mary managed the ticket shack, selling hundreds of tickets on busy days, making Horse Mountain a beloved hub for skiers of all ages. Juggling nine kids at the time and a crew of local ski buddies, the Walshes turned Horse Mountain into the heart of the local skiing community. Mary's role extended beyond the ticket shack; she became the unofficial matriarch of the mountain, ensuring everyone felt welcome and part of the Horse Mountain family.



Snack Shack, March 1967
In the windows: Mary Walsh and Patty Wing
Below from left: Jess & Kenny Bareilles, Gary Wing, James Sutton, Jack Bareilles, Linda Bareilles, and Ken Bareilles

Scan to see Jack Walsh in the movie "Like There is no Tomorrow"

Hiouska was a word posted above the Ruby Creek run by Dr. Walsh. Although no one seems to know the origin of the word, to Horse Mountain denizens, it means, "Go for it!"

Hiouska!



Humboldt Ski Club Children's ski race photo: L-R: 13-Bev Myers, (12)-Paulette Johnson, 9-Unknown, 10-Tom Baldwin, 11-Arthur Hiltner, 20-Harold Hiltner, 6-Pat Walsh, 5-Jackie Walsh, Kiffy Walsh, (4) Lizzie Walsh, (2) Heidi Kraus, (7) Paul Kraus

FRIENDLY COMPETITION

The Children's Ski Race and the Prairie Run were other popular events, inspiring a sense of friendly competition among all ages. The atmosphere was filled with laughter, excitement, and a sense of community.

These end-of-season celebrations encapsulated the spirit of Horse Mountain, where skiing was about more than just the sport—it was about family, friends, and unforgettable experiences. The Walsh family's dedication to creating these joyful events left a lasting legacy that continues to be cherished by those who experienced it.

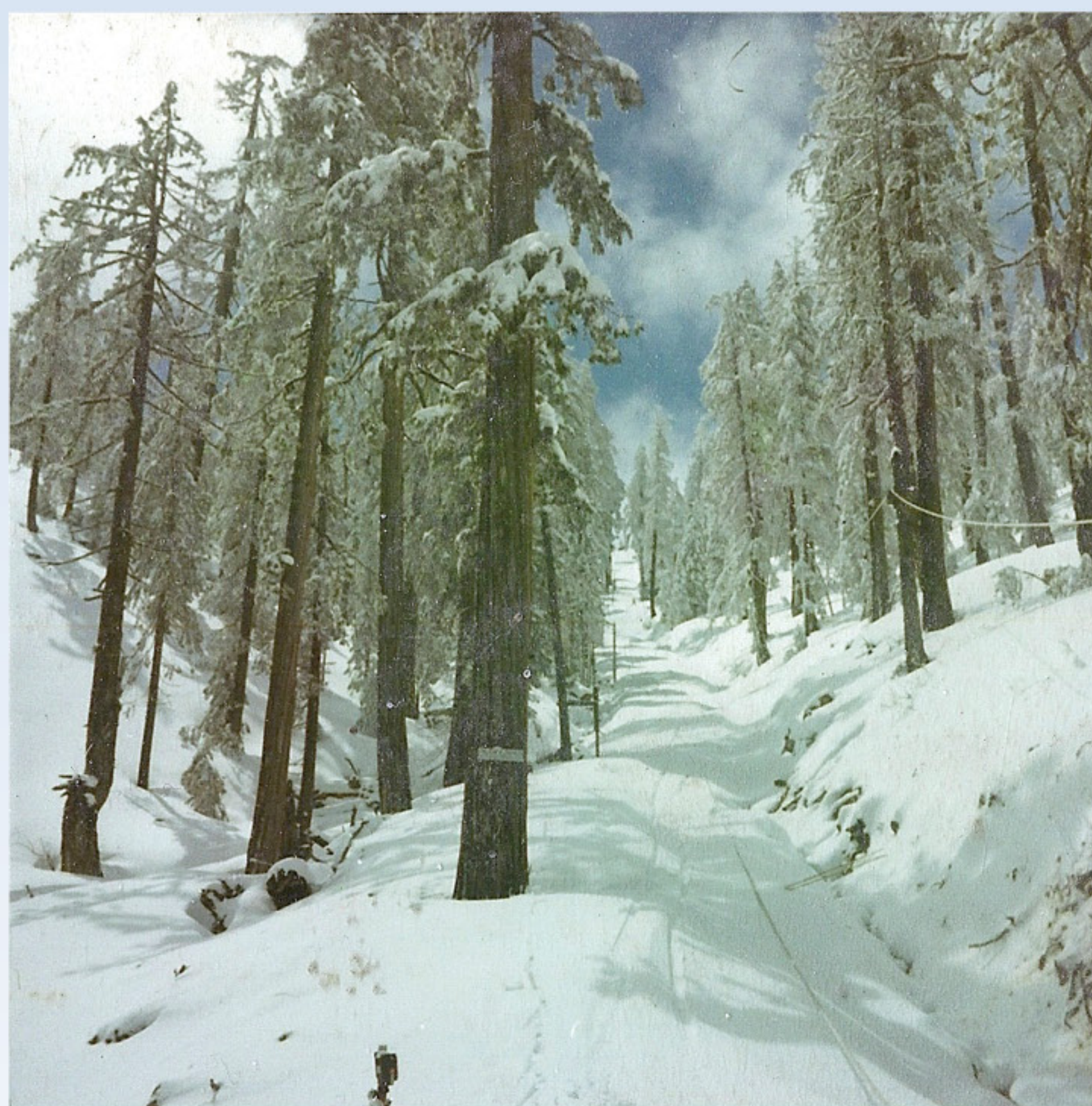


End of the season Hot Dog, Beer, and Fashion Festival. In the foreground Danny Walsh in lederhosen hands a trophy to Jackie Walsh. To the right of Jackie, in the background, note Mary Walsh in her traditional bunny suit.

Innovations & Community



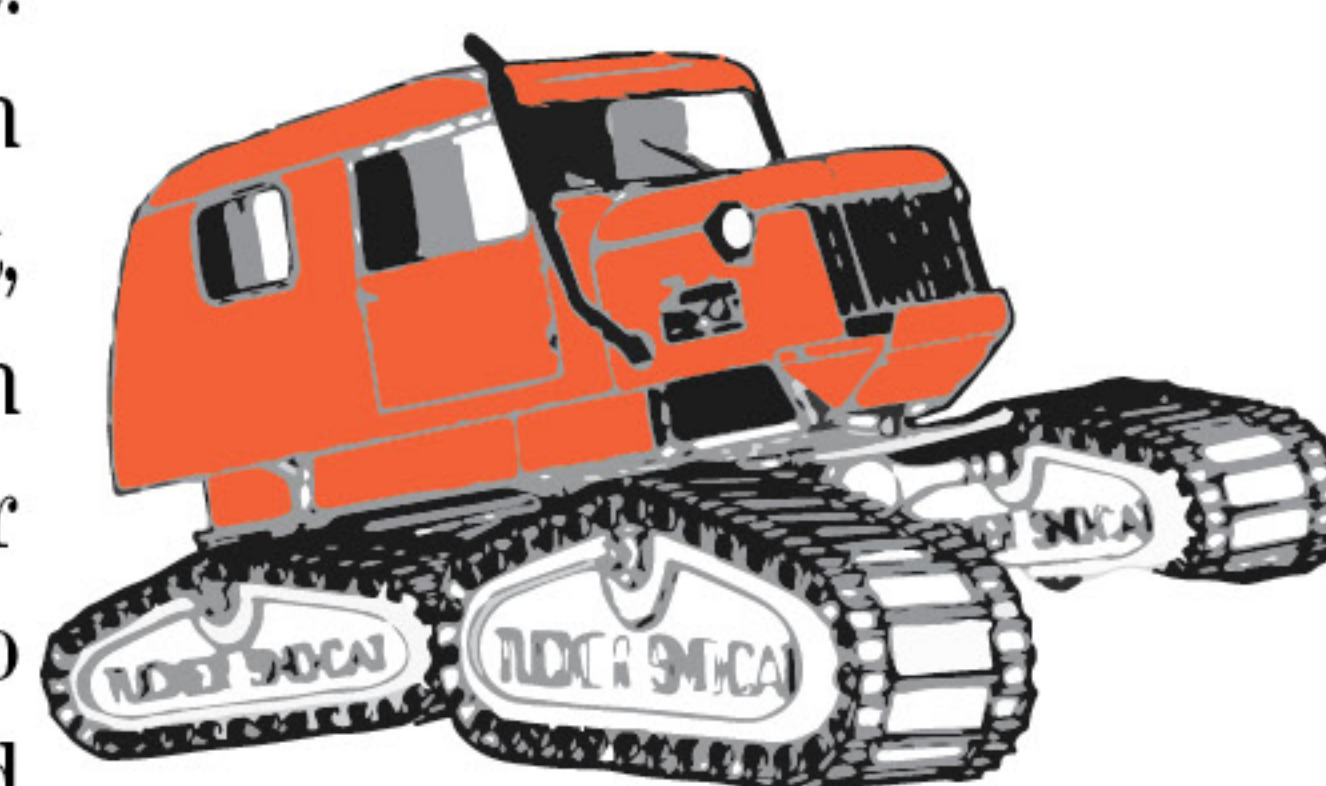
Dr. Jack Walsh's innovations included the 2-rope Beginner's Tow (right), the Free Tow, the Ruby Creek Tow and the Access Tow



Butch Mathews waves hello near the tow rope on Beginners Hill. Circa 1972

Ruby Creek Rope Tow was famous for its length, steepness and speed. Requiring significant strength and nerve to hold onto the rope tow and ascend to the top, regular skiers often used metal grippers to help them maintain their grip on the fast-moving rope which could run up to 25 mph!

The Walsh era at Horse Mountain was not just about skiing; it was about cultivating a vibrant community and creating lasting memories. In 1965 Dr. Jack Walsh took over the permits and began running the ski area with the help of Mary & their large family. They organized fun-filled events that became legendary among local skiers including the Hot Dog, Beer, and Fashion Festival, featuring free hot dogs, beer, and plenty of spirited camaraderie. Participants dressed in creative costumes, from lederhosen to bunny outfits, and competed for the best costume. The Beer Race, where skiers navigated through gates, drinking a cup of beer at each checkpoint, added a hilarious twist to the competition. Butch Mathews, a local favorite, served as a gatekeeper for the race, but one year he and his friend Bo Riewerts sampled too much of the beer and ended up losing the hotdogs they had eaten earlier, much to the amusement of their fellow skiers.



1948 Tucker Sno Cat

Skiing Together

SCHOOLS & COMMUNITY SKI CLUBS

Member Patch, 1950s



The Humboldt Ski Club, established in 1936 by Dr. Harold Carson, Paul Pellegrini, Eddie Koskela, Eddie Enquist, Jack Pidgeon and Charles Daly, played a foundational role in promoting skiing in Humboldt County. Initially, the club

built a lodge at New Prairie, about two miles south of Berry Summit, and operated two rope tows. Despite the challenges of heavy, wet snow known as Horse Mountain Powder, the club's efforts provided a structured environment for local skiers to enjoy the sport. In the late 1950s, diminishing snowfall at New Prairie led the club to move its operations to Horse Mountain, where they installed additional tows and continued to foster a vibrant skiing community.



HUMBOLDT SKI CLUB members pose for the Humboldt Standard cameraman Sunday during the initial ski run of the season on Berry Summit. Left to right are Michael Welch, 1332 Barnum place, college student; Wendell Cole, Dows Prairie elementary school principal and club president; and Ralph Kraus, 2040 Donner Drive, Eureka Junior high school teacher.

Humboldt Standard Newspaper Monday, Dec 23, 1957



Early Humboldt State College Skiers, location unknown

Skier unknown, Cal Poly Humboldt Collection

Humboldt Standard Newspaper November 2, 1965

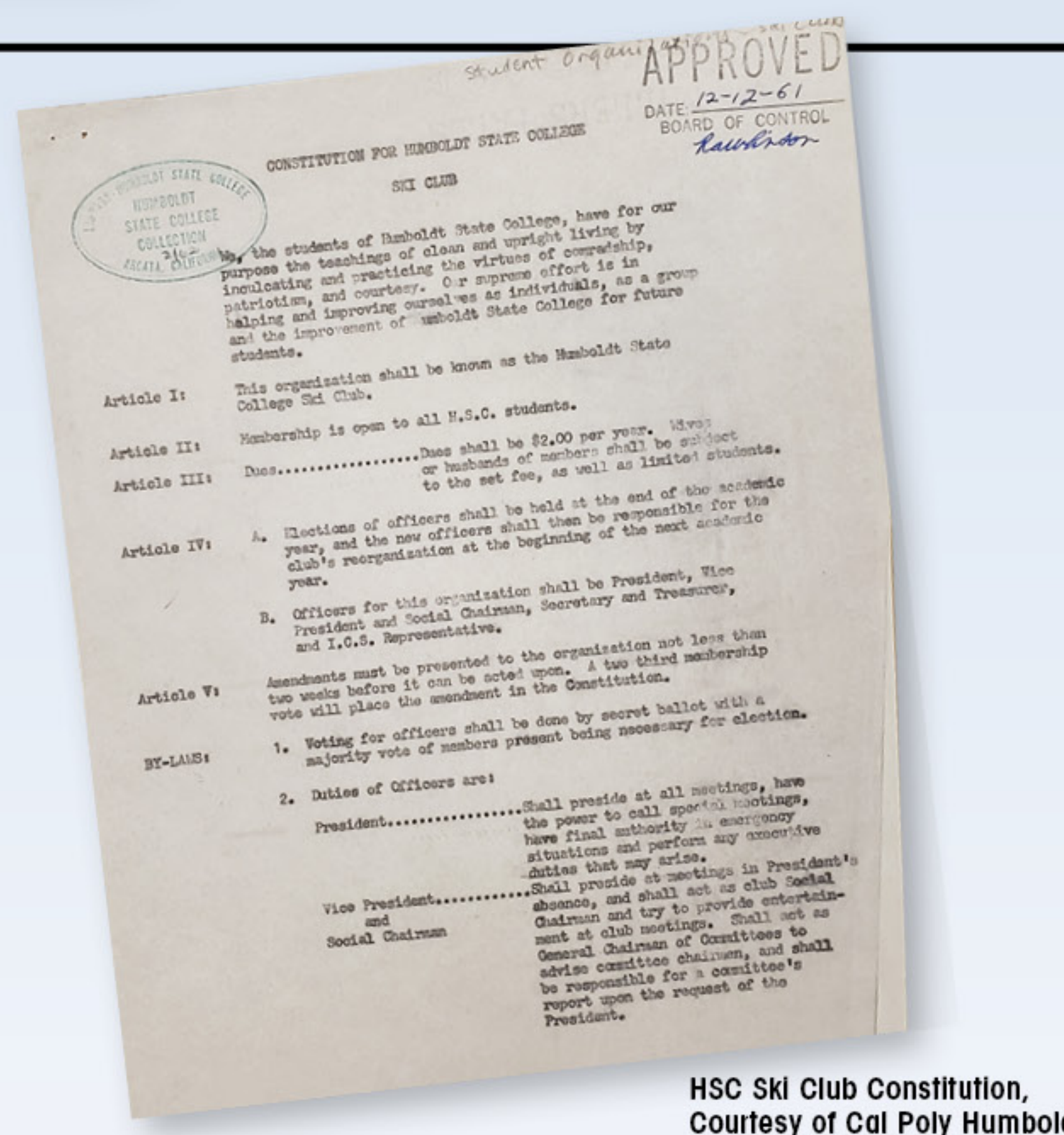
Humboldt Skiers Club Chooses Woman President

Mrs. Dudley Payer was elected first woman president of the Humboldt Ski Club at their Monday night meeting at the home of Bill Hilfiker. Outgoing president Les Mason was named vice president.

Other new officers include: treasurer Ralph Kraus and secretary Mrs. Fran Vidmar. Members of the Board of Directors for the 1965-66 ski season include: Jim Callison, Hilfiker, Bert Lewis, Mason, and Nilo Spiziale.

Dr. Jack Walsh is developing facilities at the Horse Mountain Ski Area. A new lodge will be open to the public during skiing hours where coffee and punch will be available.

The next meeting of the organization will be held on the first Monday of December.



HSC Ski Club Constitution, Courtesy of Cal Poly Humboldt

Melvin "Pinky" Pinkham and his wife Helen were key figures in the Humboldt Ski Club, frequently hosting monthly meetings in the basement of their Eureka home, which became a vibrant hub for the local skiing community. Pinky owned a ski shop at 4th and C Streets in Eureka, where he provided essential gear and fostered local skiing enthusiasm. Additionally, *Pinky was known for his ingenuity, setting up a rope tow using his Jeep*, which highlighted his dedication to making skiing accessible and enjoyable for everyone in the community. Photo from one of their many out of the area ski trips.



Helen and Melvin "Pinky" Pinkham



COMMUNITY SPIRIT ON HORSE MOUNTAIN

During the 1960s and 70s, local schools and community ski clubs continued to play an essential role in the skiing culture of Humboldt County. *Humboldt*

State College had an active ski club with its own lodge and portable ski tow, providing students with opportunities to ski and compete. Meanwhile, physical science teacher Ralph Kraus and biological science teacher Al Braud led the *Eureka Junior High Ski Club*, taking students on regular trips to Horse Mountain. These clubs organized fundraising events to make skiing accessible to more children, building a strong sense of community and camaraderie among young skiers.

SCOUTS TRANSFORM SKI SLOPES

In the summer of 1956, Bill Hilfiker and former *Boy Scouts from Explorer Post 180*, including Don Stone, Fred, Nick, and Willie Grediagin, Werner Martin, and Art Pierce, significantly contributed to the local skiing infrastructure. They built the Cedar Creek Lodge from salvaged lumber from old mining cabins and established a portable rope tow on an east-facing slope near the Horse Mountain summit using a broken-down truck from Hilfiker's father. Their initiative not only expanded the skiing area but also demonstrated the community's ingenuity and determination to create recreational opportunities despite challenging conditions.



Cedar Creek Lodge was built by Boy Scout Explorer Post 180
Shown: Loren Anderson & Nancy Hilfiker
circa early 1950s



Humboldt County Ski & Board Club

Powder Pioneers



Bill, Billy, Harold, Arthur & Nancy Hilfiker at the top of Horse Mountain. Circa 1965

Resourceful Innovator

Bill Hilfiker was a pioneering figure in Humboldt County's early skiing scene, known for his ingenuity in developing ski facilities on Horse Mountain. After the Korean War, he and his friends built their own ski tow using a V8 engine and a fishing boat towrope, overcoming numerous challenges with resourcefulness and a sense of adventure. Bill's Hilfiker was both a powerful and fearless skier, especially when given challenging snow conditions and his contributions left a lasting legacy, fondly remembered by the local skiing community.

Several families played key roles in the development and success of Horse Mountain as a skiing destination. Bill Hilfiker, a third-generation owner of Hilfiker Pipe Company, was instrumental in building the first rope tow at Horse Mountain in the 1955, turning dreams of down-hill adventures into reality. Gary Wing, who later became a ski instructor and operated the Horse Mountain Ski Area, contributed significantly during the final years of its operation, ensuring that every skier had a memorable experience. Swiss native Hans Giovanoli, known for his yodeling, added a unique cultural touch to the slopes. Following the iconic Walsh Era, The Wing dynasty, with Gary Wing at the helm managed the ski area through to its final flurries.



1

Running Horse Mountain was a labor of love -- financially, we usually broke even, but the joy it brought to the community was priceless."

Gary Wing

FROM INSTRUCTOR TO SKI OPERATOR

Gary Wing was a significant contributor to the Horse Mountain ski area in Humboldt County, California. Born in 1948, he worked as a ski instructor at the Willamette Pass Ski Area while attending college. Later, he offered ski lessons at Horse Mountain and owned and operated a Ski Shop in Eureka. During the ski area's final seasons (1982-1983), Gary took over operations, ensuring the continuation of skiing activities despite challenges like declining snowfall. He was instrumental in maintaining and running the rope tows and other equipment, showcasing his dedication and commitment to the local skiing community.

SCAN TO HEAR ME YODELING MY WAY DOWN THE MOUNTAIN!



A group of local ski enthusiasts at Kneeland. Reading from left to right: Mrs. Harold Carson, Dr. Carson, Royal McCarthy, Miss Eris Green, Dr. Jack Walsh, Miss June Pierce, Edward Enquist, Mrs. Bert Wood, Bert Wood, president of Humboldt Ski Club; Mrs. Clarence Clarke and Clarence (Bud) Clarke.

2



3



4

- 1 Butch Mathews watches as Gary Wing flies by
- 2 Left to Right: Flip Carson, Dr. Harold Carson, Royal McCarthy, Eris Green, Dr. Jack Walsh, June Pierce, Edward Enquist, Joanne Wood, Bert Wood, Jane Clark and Bud Clark
- 3 Left to Right: Greg Koppala, Butch Mathews, Danny Walsh, Jeff Clark, Burt Lewis, Jackie Walsh, Bo Riewerts & Mark Siipola
Top of Ruby Creek. 1971
- 4 Brice & June Papini

Hans Giovanoli, Swiss Native, Ski Instructor, Baker. West side of Beginner's Hill
Photographer: Weldon Benzinger



The Grippers

More fun by happenstance than others have by design

The "gripper,"
a wrench-like tool
that provided a firm
hold on the rope
tow, making an
uphill skiing journey
more manageable.

Nestled in the snow-clad slopes of Six Rivers National Forest, Horse Mountain has long been a cherished winter playground for Humboldt County locals. In the 1960s, a group of ski-loving kids from Eureka would escape to its snowy slopes, planting the seed for what would become "The Grippers." After high school, the neighborhood gang largely went their separate ways, with the demands of starting families and careers leaving little time for old connections.



However, this group of dear friends, united by their shared passion for skiing, formed a bond that has spanned decades, evolving into a legacy of adventure and camaraderie. In the early '90s, a new tradition began: a ski-trip reunion at the Walsh family home in Palisades Tahoe. This gathering rekindled their passion for skiing and reinforced their commitment to staying active and connected, marking the moment they dubbed themselves "The Grippers."

The Grippers' adventures didn't stop at skiing. Members like Chairman Tom Quigley, Francis "Butch" Mathews and Bo Riewerts, expanded their activities to include rafting, pickleball, golf and cycling



The Grippers on the slopes of Palisades Tahoe (formerly Squaw Valley), Lake Tahoe in the background



Central to The Grippers' enduring spirit is Dr. Jack Walsh, the inspirational figure who first brought them together (pictured center)

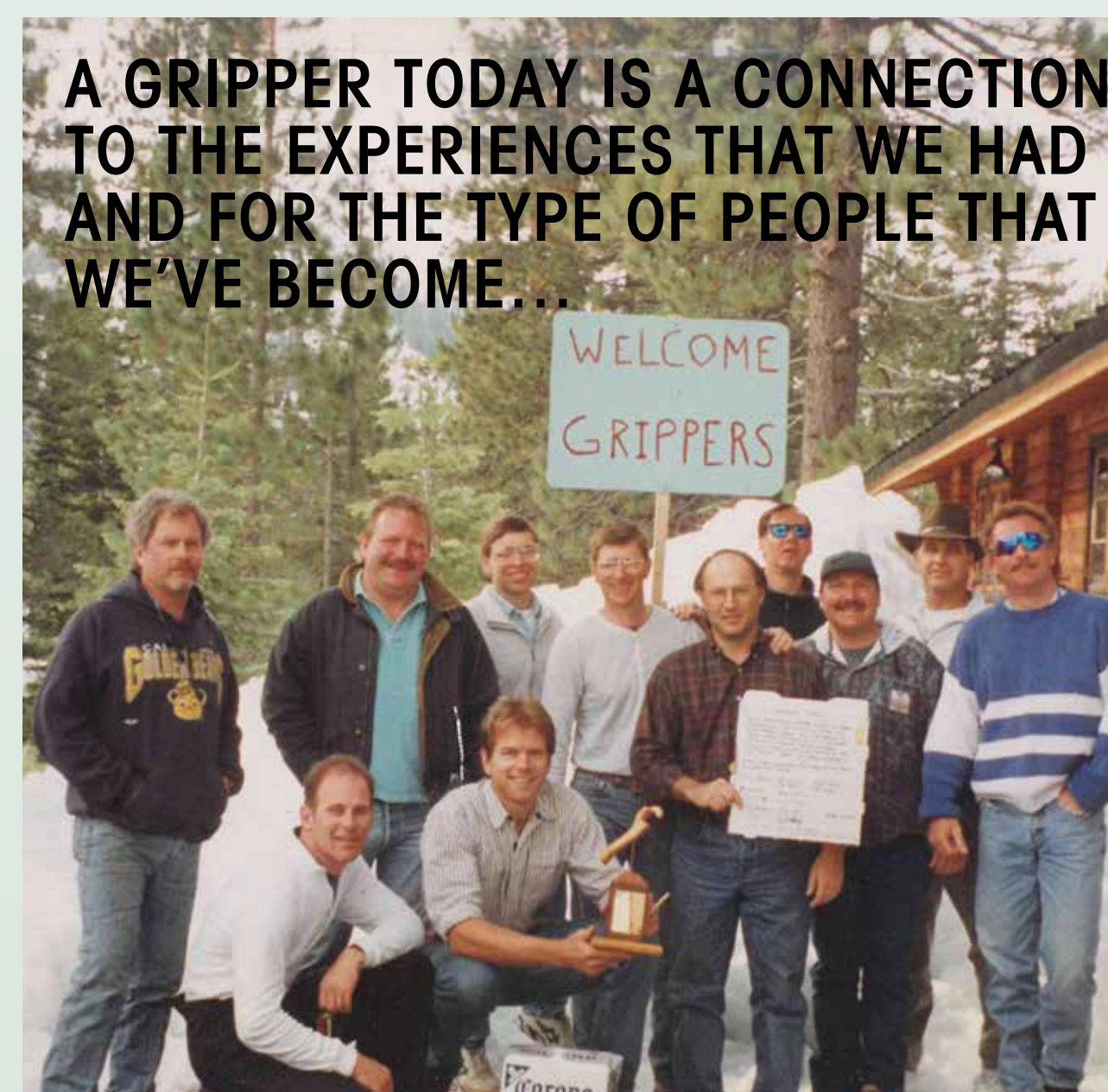


*The thing we all share
in common is growing
up in Humboldt County
— and our experiences
at Horse Mountain*

—Francis "Butch" Mathews,
a charter member of the group



May 2007 The Grippers gather at the Ingomar Club for a pre Tour of the Unknown Coast ride. Dr Jack & Mary Walsh are pictured



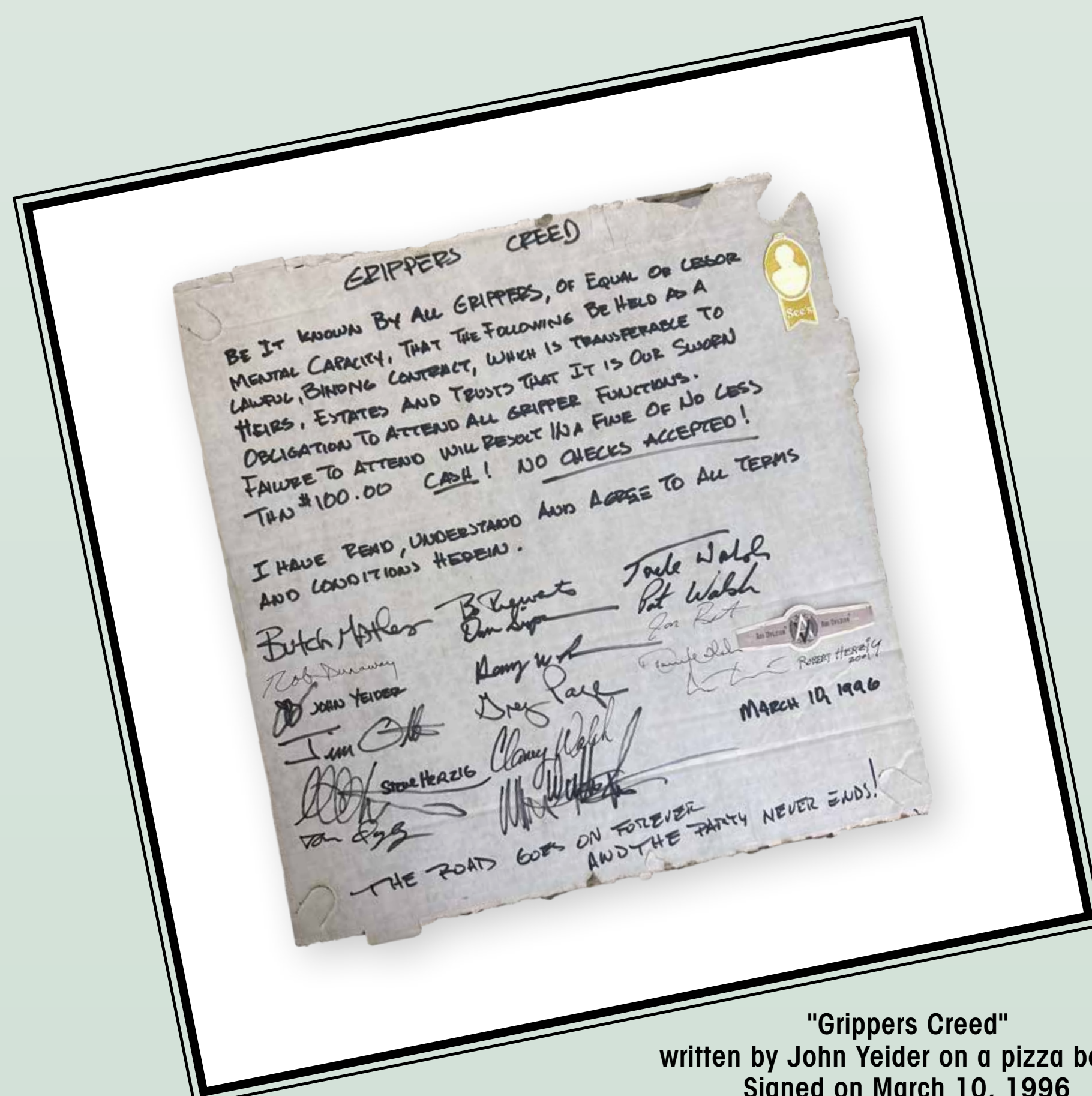
"A Gripper today is a connection to the experiences that we had and for the type of people that we've become..."
—Gripper Chairman Tom Quigley



Butch Mathews & Kirk Cesaretti



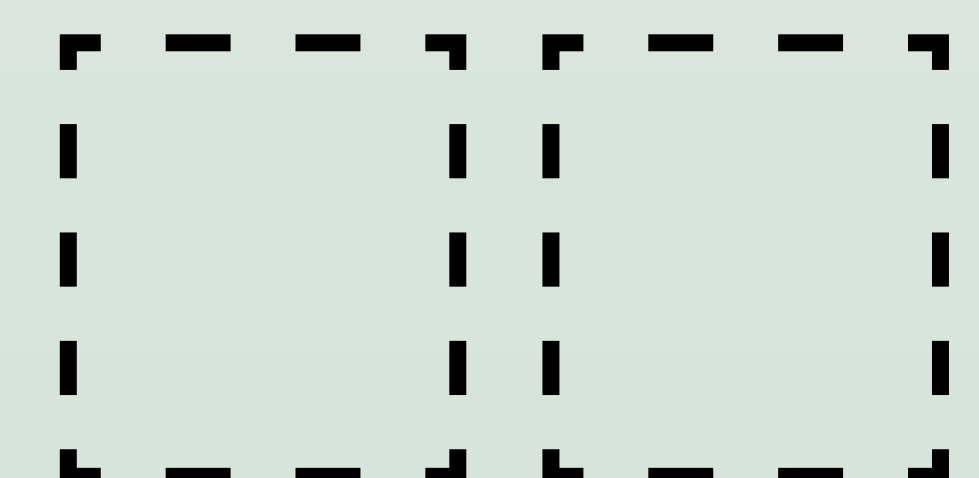
Left to right: Tom Quigley, Dave Murray, and Billy Hilfiker with Hilfiker's Powder Patrol Snow Cat



"Grippers Creed"
written by John Yeider on a pizza box lid
Signed on March 10, 1996

The Grippers are more than just a group of long-time friends; they are a testament to the power of shared experiences and the enduring nature of childhood bonds.

Their annual gatherings, whether on the slopes or cycling tours, celebrate their history and friendship. From the snowy peaks of Horse Mountain to the rugged paths of the Tour of the Unknown Coast, The Grippers continue to write their legacy, one filled with laughter, determination, and an unbreakable bond.



Scan to See &
Hear More
Like There is
No Tomorrow

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