Jackson's Town Hill: Snow King Ski Area

"Snow King, the town hill, rising up abruptly at the south edge of Jackson provokes fond memories for townspeople who were growing up in the days when skiing was becoming popular as a sport, and Snow King was becoming developed as a ski hill."

Survey and Preliminary Evaluation of Historic Significance and Integrity

Prepared by Mary Humstone, Humstone Consulting

for the

Teton County Historic Preservation Board

November, 2011

Revised January, 2012

Jackson's Town Hill: Snow King Ski Area

Survey and Preliminary Evaluation of Historic Significance and Integrity

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 2

Snow King Time Line 3

History of the Snow King Ski Area 4

Description and Property Types 12

Analysis and Recommendations 20

References 22

Acknowledgements 23

Executive Summary

Since the 1930s, the Snow King ski area has played an important role in recreation, commerce and community development in Wyoming and Jackson Hole. As Wyoming's first ski area, Snow King paved the way for similar winter resorts on Forest Service land in the Wind River, Bighorn and Medicine Bow mountains. Within Jackson Hole, the development of Snow King fostered a community culture built around the enjoyment and skill of winter sports, which eventually made Jackson Hole an international ski destination. Although later eclipsed by the Jackson Hole Ski Area, Snow King first established Jackson's reputation as a ski town.

The Snow King ski area can be evaluated from many different perspectives, including those of skiers, hikers, naturalists and planners as well as cultural historians. This report examines the property as a cultural landscape which reflects the development of skiing and ski culture in Jackson Hole. As an operating ski area, Snow King has necessarily changed to keep pace with the changes in the sport of skiing, and many of the character-defining features of the historic landscape have been replaced in the past 50 years with updated ski facilities. However, the mountain itself and the ski trails retain integrity as character-defining elements of the cultural landscape that have shaped the image and character of Jackson Hole since the late 1930s. While Snow King is used and enjoyed year-round, it is when the mountain is covered with snow and its trails distinctly defined that its visual and cultural connection with the community is the strongest.

In order for a property to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it must have documented historic significance and retain historic integrity, so that its significance can be seen and understood. There is no doubt that the Snow King ski area is significant in Jackson Hole history and culture. This preliminary evaluation has determined that the property also retains sufficient integrity to warrant nomination to the National Register of Historic Places as a cultural landscape. Further research is required to positively identify and evaluate all of the contributing and non-contributing features of the landscape.

Snow King Time Line

- 1926: Mike O'Neil builds a ski jump on Jackson's "Town Hill"
- 1932 (circa): Town hill named the "Ruth Hanna Simms Ski Hill" in honor of local resident who donated money to build a ski jump
- 1936: CCC constructs horse and hiking trail to the top of the hill
- 1937: Jackson Hole Ski Association and Jackson Hole Ski Club formed
- 1938 (circa): Ski area name changed to "Snow King"
- 1939: Town of Jackson purchases 7 acres at foot of ski hill
- 1939: Old Man's Flats rope tow, first cable tow on Snow King, opens; Neil Rafferty becomes part-time lift operator
- 1940: First annual Tri-State (WY, ID, UT) meet sponsored by Jackson Hole Ski Club
- 1944: Community-built ski shelter dedicated by Olaus Murie
- 1946: Jackson Hole Winter Sports Association formed to upgrade ski area; purchases old gold-ore tram from Salida, Colorado for chairlift
- 1947: Single chairlift opens (January 7)
- 1949: Single chairlift carries 8,500 people to the top of Snow King during the 1948-1949 season
- 1954: Jackson Hole Ski Club and Snow King host Junior Nationals
- 1958: Supervised Forest Service burn on Snow King for clearing brush and new runs; work begins to convert single chairlift to a double chairlift
- 1959: Double chairlift opens
- 1963: Jackson Hole Ski Club and Snow King host Junior Nationals
- 1971: Western Standard Corporation purchases the Snow King ski area operation and 60 acres at the base of the hill; hires Neil Rafferty as ski area manager and Manuel Lopez as project manager for development of Snow King Resort
- 1974: Neil Rafferty retires after 35 years
- 1976: Snow King Ramada Inn opened by Western Standard Corporation
- 1978: Rafferty lift constructed on east slope of Snow King; land leased to Western Slide Corporation to build and operate a summer slide
- 1981: new Summit Lift constructed
- 1981: Americana Hotels buys part interest in Snow King
- 1987: Western Standard Corporation reclaims full ownership of resort and ski area
- 1989: community celebrates 50th anniversary of Snow King
- 1993: Snow King Center (ski center and ice rink) opens; old ski shelter demolished
- 1994: Cougar triple chairlift opens; 1,200 riders per hour
- 1996: Jackson Hole Ski Club hosts regional race teams pre-season invitational
- 1998: King's Tubes (tubing hill) opened
- 2002: Pre-Winter Olympic Training at Snow King (8 international ski teams, many medaled)
- 2005: Snow King Holdings formed from Western Standard Company
- 2010: Pre-Winter Olympic Training at Snow King, U.S and French women's ski teams

History of the Snow King Ski Area

Early history

Skiing has been part of Jackson Hole culture for more than 100 years. Historic photographs and local histories show that by the early 1900s skiing was established as a way to get around the valley during the long winter months, and a necessity for carrying the mail before an official post office was established. As transportation improved, skiing changed from a necessity to winter recreation. The hill now known as Snow King offered an ideal location for skiing. It was conveniently located right in town, and its lower slopes were sparsely forested due to a forest fire in 1879, making skiing down viable – if not exactly easy. Starting in the 1920s, skiers began hiking up the mountain – sometimes called Kelly's Hill or simply "the town hill"- and enjoying the steep downhill run.[1]

Early on, ski jumping was a popular sport on the hill. Mike O'Neil, who moved to Jackson during the winter of 1925-1926 with the Forest Service, built one of the first ski jumps on Snow King. "Everybody around here in the early thirties was just going to the top of the hill and going straight down and trusting to a bit of ability and a heck of a lot of luck," said longtime skier and eventual Snow King manager Neil Rafferty. "Or they were building a jump somewhere and trying to ride over it. Jumping was a big kick then."[2]

In 1936, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) constructed a horse and hiking trail to the top of Snow King for the Forest Service, thus making the first of many physical changes to the hill to facilitate its use for recreation. The CCC trail became the first "official" ski run on the mountain. The following year, mountaineer and skier Fred Brown helped to form the Jackson Hole Ski Association which launched a national campaign to promote skiing in Jackson Hole. Among the events promoted by Brown and his colleagues were a demonstration of the latest techniques and equipment by the Dartmouth College ski team, and "ski circuses" – entertainment on skis put on by a local group called the "Hoback Boys" who performed in cowboy garb.[3] Brown also became the first president of the Jackson Hole Ski Club, which was organized that same year to develop ski activities, including a racing program, for the local community. In its first year the Jackson Hole Ski Club sponsored a ski jump and downhill competition that started from what is now called Old Man's Flats and followed the switch-backed CCC trail, challenging skiers who had previously only skied straight downhill.[4] The ski club was responsible for changing the name of the hill to Snow King in the late 1930s.

---

[1] Thomas Turiano, *Teton Skiing: A History and Guide to the Teton Range* (Moose: Homestead Publishing, 1995), 34.
[2] As quoted in David Gonzales, *Jackson Hole, On a Grand Scale* (Boulder: Mountain Sports Press, 2001), 32.
[3] Gonzales, 35.
[4] "The Town Hill," *Teton Magazine*, V. 6 (1973-74), 24.

Neil Rafferty, who came to Jackson in 1930 and was one of the town's early ski promoters, was instrumental in developing and running the ski area at Snow King for 35 years, earning the moniker "Father of Snow King." His first few years of skiing involved hiking up to Old Man's Flats and skiing down. However, in 1939 he competed for and won a contract with the Jackson Hole Club, an early chamber of commerce, to build an "uphill" facility on Snow King. In exchange for building the cable tow, he was given a lease on the town land. He secured a permit from the Forest Service to run the lift, and a new ski era in Jackson began.

Figure 1: Cable tow at Snow King, 1940 (Jackson Hole Historical Society)

The cable, bought used from an oil drilling company in Casper, Wyoming, ran through a narrow cut in the forest up the west side of the ski area. It was powered by an old Ford tractor. Skiers attached themselves to the cable with metal clamps and ropes for their 8-minute ride up the mountain to Old Man's Flats. The cable tow could handle 18 to 20 skiers at a time. Skiers were supposed to return the clamps to the base after their ride, but many left them at the top for Rafferty to collect at the end of the day.[5]

Once the tow was established at Snow King, skiing gained in popularity and the Jackson Hole Ski Club began regularly sponsoring races and other events, starting with the first annual Tri-State meet in 1940. By 1945 Rafferty had added two rope tows and was operating the ski area Wednesday and Thursday afternoons, and weekends from 11 am to 6 pm. He added lights to the slopes to allow the area to stay open past dark. In addition to running lifts, Rafferty had to clear trails and build roads. "With lots of help from locals, Neil was able to create the first prepared ski slopes in northwest Wyoming."[6]

Rafferty was well known for developing a good relationship with the Forest Service. Snow King was one of the first ski areas to be permitted on Forest Service land, and its success laid the foundation for later development of other Forest Service ski areas.[7] The 1939 Teton National Forest "Recreation Master Plan" makes a brief mention of skiing and other winter sports, identifying the "Jackson Winter Sports area" (Snow King) as "easily accessible to school children and local residents." The plan notes that the Forest Service boundary cut across the face of the hill, with the lower portion being owned by the town of Jackson. The plan also notes that because of its proximity to town this area received more intensive

[5] *Jackson Hole Guide*, 1/18/89.
[6] *Jackson Hole Guide*, 5/17/95.
[7] Ibid.

use during the winter months than the Teton Pass area, which at this time had no lift facilities but was accessible by highway.[8]

Figure 2: First chair lift, Snow King, c. 1950 (Jackson Hole Historical Society)

The first chairlift

Rafferty ran the Snow King ski operation on his own, as a part-time job, from 1939 until 1946. That year a new corporation, the Jackson Hole Winter Sports Association, was formed with its immediate purpose being to take advantage of the post-war boom in the ski industry nationwide by installing a chairlift to the top of Snow King. The association raised $40,000 from local investors, bought an old tramway which had been used in a gold mining operation near Salida, Colorado, and hired a Denver contractor to construct a lift from it. Included in the purchase were structural beams for the top and bottom terminals, bullwheels, cables, towers and carriers. The ore buckets that originally hung from the carriers were replaced with single chairs. The lift was installed in 1946-1947 and was an instant sensation; in its first full year of operation (1948-1949), more than 8,500 people rode the lift to the top of the mountain. Rafferty was hired as the association's full-time director, and continued to manage the ski operations until his retirement in 1974.

The 3,800'-long lift rose 1,400 feet through a narrow cut in the trees to the summit of Snow King, and serviced trails such as Belly Roll (described in a 1949 guide as a 1.25-mile expert racing trail) and Elk Run, a 1.25 mile intermediate trail. Both of these trails still exist today, although somewhat wider than they were 60 years ago. The run called "Exhibition" today was a winding trail through the trees known as Screwy Schuss; today's Cougar was called The Funnel. There were also two rope tows of 1,000 and 600 feet respectively which serviced open slopes, and two jumps, a 40-meter and a 20-meter. Warming lodges were available at both the top and bottom of the ski area, with a snack shop at the top.[9]

---

[8] *Teton National Forest Recreation Master Plan*, 1939 (Karl C. Allan Collection, Box 5, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming).

[9] Joan and David Landman, *Where to Ski: Ski Guide to the U.S. and Canada* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), 178.

When the lift opened, the upper part of the mountain was quite heavily wooded. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s improvements were made to the trails on the hill, which gradually went from narrow cuts through the forest to bona fide ski runs. A June 1946 newspaper article notes that "a great deal of timber clearing is to be done on the hill."[10]

A 1948 brochure about Jackson Hole has this to say about Snow King:

> "Snow King Mountain in Jackson, where the high capacity chairlift rises 1600 feet above town, offers a variety of runs for expert and novice skiiers [sic] and a special children's area with bunny tow. A paid patrolman is on duty at all times and the ski lift is located within six blocks of one of Wyoming's best equipped hospitals."[11]

Although the new lift was popular, the ski area was not an immediate financial success, and Neil Rafferty credits Jackson Hole Winter Sports Association president Fred Toppan with helping to keep the operation afloat for the first ten years or so.[12] In order to increase use of the lift, the association added a half-way station to enable novice skiers to access suitable terrain without resorting to a rope tow. They also began serious promotion of summer lift rides to the top of Snow King.[13]

By the late 1950s, the single chairlift was decidedly outdated and the Winter Sports Association began making plans to upgrade it to a double chair. Work began in fall 1958. The old cable was replaced with an 8,800-pound track cable and a new break-over tower was constructed at the top of the lift for unloading the double chairs. The new lift opened in 1959.

Figure 3: Top of double chairlift, c. 1960, showing unloading area now used as observation deck (Jackson Hole Historical Society)

The upper bullwheel was likely housed in what is now the ski patrol building. The unloading platform was constructed of steel posts and girders, with board decking, ramps and stairs. It still exists in much the same configuration today and is used as an observation deck. On the deck were two small, gable-roofed buildings, a lift service building and the "Snack Shack," which sported a sign reading "Order Picnics Here." It appears that the small lift service building was of half-log construction and dated from the earlier lift; the Snack Shack is still located at the top of the mountain, although moved from its original location.

son Hole Guide, 11/17/66.

[11] "Jackson Hole Wyoming" brochure, 1948 (Jackson Hole Historical Society)

[12] "The Town Hill," 60.

[13] Jackson Hole Winter Sports Association records, Ina Rafferty Collection (Jackson Hole Historical Society).

A 1963 guide to Jackson Hole notes the features of the Snow King ski area, including the "1,700-foot vertical drop, excellent trails for the advanced beginner, intermediate, and expert skier, and a 40 meter jump . . . Serviced by a 4,000 foot double chairlift and three rope tows." The entry also notes the certified ski school and the "public lodge, eating facilities and skating rink" located at the base of the mountain.[14]

Recent history

In 1971, Western Standard Corporation of Riverton, Wyoming, purchased the Snow King ski area operation along with 60 acres at the base of the mountain. The corporation's main interest was developing a resort hotel and convention center. At the time of purchase, Western Standard also secured a lease from the town of Jackson on 27 contiguous acres on the mountain, and a 20-year Forest Service lease on the Snow King ski and recreational area (approximately 375 acres). As part of the ski area acquisition, the company acquired the double chairlift, the log ski shelter building at the base, and the warming building and snack shack at the summit, as well as the log house known as the Kelly-Murie house and the Alphorn Motel at the base of the mountain. Western Standard created a wholly-owned subsidiary, Snow King Inc., to manage the ski area, and hired Neil Rafferty as manager. Rafferty retired three years later, in 1974.

Western Standard built the current Snow King Lodge, which opened as the Ramada Snow King Inn in 1976. In 1979, the operations and property development of Western Standard in Jackson Hole, including the Snow King Inn and Snow King ski area, were consolidated under Snow King Resort, with Manuel Lopez as general manager. In 1981 Americana Hotels bought a part interest in the operation, and the hotel was renamed the Americana Snow King. This came to an end in 1987, when Americana's interest was bought back by Snow King Resort. In 1992 Snow King Resort was restructured as Snow King Resort, Inc.

Western Standard continued to develop the ski area. A new lift named after Neil Rafferty was built on the east side of Snow King (Kelly's Alley) in 1978, to service an alpine slide in the summer as well as winter skiing, and ski runs and trails were expanded. Night skiing was introduced as a regular feature at Snow King during the 1980-1981 season. That same year a new double chairlift replaced the old lift first constructed in 1946. The triple-chair Cougar lift was added in 1994, providing better access to intermediate terrain.

Summer lift rides

Soon after constructing the first chairlift, the Jackson Hole Winter Sports Association decided to try to increase profits by running the lift in the summer. The summer business helped the bottom line, especially after the double chairlift was installed in 1959. By 1961, Snow King had a summer business

[14] Dick and Fran Lange, *Jackson's Hole—A Winter Adventure* (Jackson: Frontier Press Inc., 1963), 17.

that included an alpine slide and chairlift rides to the summit, where one could get a snack and take in the view at the glass-walled restaurant known as Panorama House.[15]

Ski school and ski patrol

By the early 1940s Snow King had a ski school with highly qualified operators who were competitive skiers. This tradition has continued for decades, and includes the Great American Ski School at Snow King Mountain established by Bill Briggs in 1967. The school has taught some of the best skiers in the valley. In the 1970s, Briggs wrote and published two skiers' manuals on his unique ski instruction method.

Figure 4: Snow King Ski School, 1940-1941 (Jackson Hole Historical Society)

Snow King also established a ski patrol manned by members of the local community. It was officially established as the Jackson Hole Chapter of the National Ski Patrol in 1941.

Community connections: the "Town Hill"

Snow King has always been the local hill, or the "town hill." "For three generations, Snow King Mountain has been the town ski hill, and it and the first operator, Neil Rafferty, were valley parents' babysitters of choice," writes Connie Wieneke. "Talk to anyone who grew up in the town hill's shadow during those years [1950s through 1970s] and you'll be talking to someone who learned to ski not long after learning to walk."[16] Many of these Snow King kids went on to ski on their college teams and compete and coach nationally and internationally.

"[Snow King] was really a success because it was right there. My kids were brought up on that mountain. Everybody's kids were. You could leave the babies in the bassinet in the station wagon at the bottom of the hill, take a run, then go check on them," said Virginia Huidekoper, a top ski racer in the 1930s and 1940s who eventually settled in Jackson and was a founding member of the Jackson Hole Winter Sports Association and founder of *Jackson Hole News*.[17]

The Jackson community pitched in to make the ski area successful, whether by investing in its operations, volunteering for ski patrol, or volunteering labor and materials to build the ski shelter, which was constructed of logs over a period of years starting in 1939 and was dedicated by local

---

[15] Orrin H. and Lorraine G. Bonney, *Bonney's Guide: Grand Teton National Park & Jackson's Hole* (Houston: O.H. and L.G. Bonney, 1961), 100.
[16] Connie Wieneke, *Jackson Hole: Crossroads of the West* (Helena: American & World Geographic Publishing, 1996), 71.
[17] Gonzales, 36-37.

conservationist Olaus Murie in 1944.[18] "The demolition of the old Shelter [in 1993] signaled the end of an era. No longer could dances and box socials alone pay for buildings and coaches."[19]

"Many people really helped at these critical times," said Neil Rafferty, "by cutting trees, burning and building the ski shelter. Many businessmen in town would finance a man's wages for one day or two days. The community really appreciated what skiing could do for them." The ski club members even indulged in some secretive night-time tree cutting to open up a bottleneck area where the Forest Service declined to allow additional cuts.[20]

Starting in the 1930s, the ski club began sponsoring events such as the Town Downhill, the Ski Ball and the 49er Ball to raise money for the ski area as well as encourage residents to come out and ski. Since 1967 the ski school has hosted a winter carnival for kids on the last day of ski classes. That same year the Snow King Climb, the valley's oldest foot race, was first held. Starting in 1975 a season-ending snowmobile climb has marked the official end of the skiing season. In a joint project sponsored by the Jackson Hole Winter Sports Association and the Forest Service from 1960 to 1965, Jackson Hole grade school students planted lodgepole pine trees as a snow fence to prevent drifting snow and build up of cornices at the summit.[21]

Figure 5: Skiers at the 1940 Tri-State meet at Snow King (Jackson Hole Historical Society)

Snow King is well known for hosting races, jumping competitions and other events. In 1954 the Jackson Hole Ski Club and Snow King hosted the Junior National races. Concerned about the lack of snow on the slopes, residents began hauling snow by truck from the Teton National Forest in Wilson – until they were stopped by the Forest Service. Undeterred, local ski enthusiast Jim Huidekoper drove all the way to Colorado Springs to procure a snow-making machine, which was used round the clock but only produced ¼ inch of snow. Fortunately nature cooperated and brought a good snowfall just before the meet.[22]

[18] "The Town Hill," 52.
[19] Wieneke, 71.
[20] "The Town Hill," 56, 61.
[21] Rebecca Woods, *Jackson Hole Hikes* (Jackson: White Willow Publishing, 2009), 289.
[22] "The Town Hill," 62-63.

"Every time we had a ski race there were always the mothers that were at the foot of the hill. They always put up a tent and mostly the mothers of the kids that skied were out there selling hot dogs or hamburgers for the benefit of the ski club," local resident Mugs Schultz told *Teton Magazine* in 1973. "Snow King had the best ski races held in the United States for years and years. They had more devoted people in Jackson that were out there for gate keepers, timers and starters. The course was always in excellent condition." [23]

Snow King's anniversaries have been well celebrated by the community, starting with a "40 years of chair lift service" Snow King Festival celebration in 1987, with races and a kids' carnival. A 50-year anniversary celebration in January 1989 was a "wild, week-long bash" that went on for nine days and featured all kinds of races, outdoor barbeques, concerts, fireworks, a kids' carnival and dances as well as banquets honoring the founders of the ski area.[24]

Snow King is mostly, but not solely, about skiing. During the off season it has been used by the community as a concert and party venue. It is estimated that about 500 people climb up Snow King every day during the summer months, and many more ride the chairlift to take in the view, or enjoy a fast, downhill mountain bike ride. "Climb the King" is a summer-long fund raiser for the Jackson Hole Community Counseling Center. In 2009, 646 climbers made the ascent 8,146 times, raising almost $75,000.

Figure 6: Summer lift ride on the single chair, 1955 (Jackson Hole Historical Society)

[23] Ibid, 62-64.
[24] *Jackson Hole News*, 1/25/89.

Description and Property Types

Figure 7: Aerial view of Snow King and Jackson, showing the ski area as a visual backdrop for the town (Jackson Hole Historical Society)

Snow King Ski Area comprises 465 acres at the base and on the north-facing slopes of Snow King Mountain. The area is situated just east of the center of Jackson, Wyoming. The ski area is served by three chairlifts and rises from 6,237 feet at the base to 7,808 feet at the summit, a vertical rise of 1,571 feet. Land for the ski operation not owned by Snow King Resort is leased from the Town of Jackson and the U.S. Forest Service.

The ski area consists of a resort hotel (Snow King Hotel), condominiums (Love Ridge Resort Lodges at Grand View Lodge), the Snow King Center (base lodge with cafeteria and indoor ice rink) and lift stations at the base of the mountain; three ski lifts; an alpine slide; trails and open ski slopes; an observation deck, ski patrol lodge and restaurant building at the top of the mountain; and numerous small landscape features. Also within the overall ski area, although separated from it by a chain-link fence, is Jackson's Aspen Cemetery.

The ski area is visible from almost everywhere in Jackson, and vice versa. The mountain rises steeply from the valley floor. Vegetation, consisting of aspen at the lower elevations and evergreens above, is thick except where cut for ski trails and slopes. Numerous trails and a main service road traverse the ski slopes. These are popular for hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding in the summer months.

Character-defining features

Character-defining features of a cultural landscape are those features that best represent the character and historic and cultural significance of the property. The character-defining features of the Snow King ski area include the mountain itself, ski slopes and trails, ski lifts and hospitality and service buildings. Of these, the most visible and significant are the ski slopes and trails, which can be seen from any place in Jackson Hole and the surrounding area, and which have come to define the image of Jackson for residents and visitors alike.

Ski runs and trails

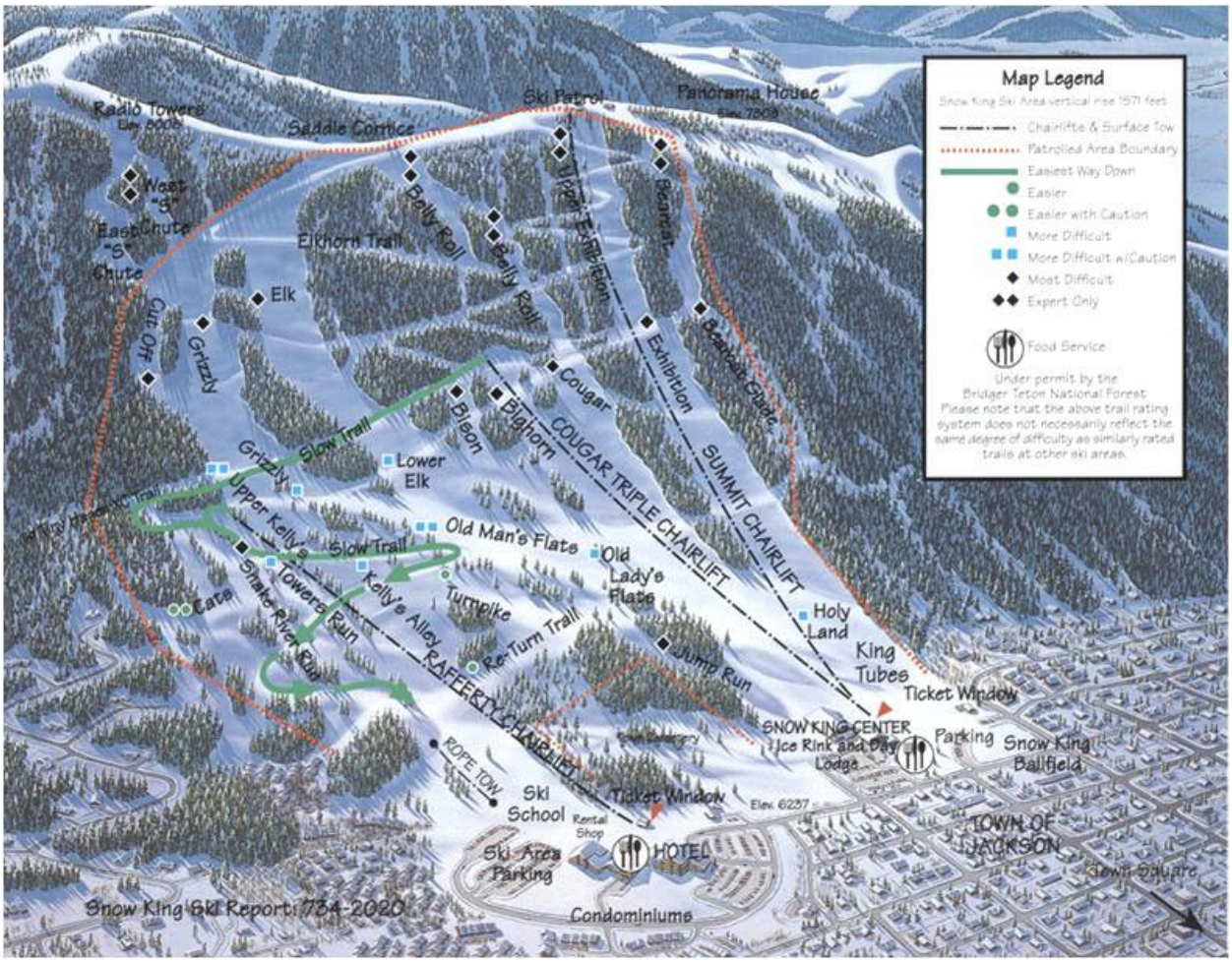

Figure 8: Snow King ski area trail map, 2011 (Snow King website, http://www.snowking.com)

The most visible and recognizable features of the Snow King landscape are the ski runs and trails. These appear in photographs of Jackson dating back to the 1930s. They serve as a backdrop for the town of Jackson, and have come to define its image. Photographs dating from the 1940s show much the same configuration of ski runs and trails as is found today. The base of the mountain has remained mostly open, while the upper runs have gradually been widened. By comparing pre-1965 maps and photographs of the ski area with the mountain as it appears today, it is possible to determine which trails are historic, and which retain integrity. The following runs and trails appear in pre-1965 maps and photographs of the ski area:

<u>Exhibition</u>: This run follows the original chairlift line. Although the lower portion of the run has not been changed, the upper portion (Upper Exhibition) has been widened. This run was accessed by a midway station about three-quarters of the way up the mountain until the old lift was replaced in 1981.
<u>Bearcat/Beartooth Glade</u>
<u>Belly Roll/Cougar</u>
<u>Elk/Lower Elk/Old Man's Flats</u>: Old Man's Flats was the location of the first cable tow in 1939.

Grizzly
Kelly's Alley
East "S" and West "S"
Towers Run
Jump Run
Snake River Run
Cate
Traverses: Elkhorn Trail, Slow Trail, Re-turn Trail

The following runs appear to have been built after 1965:

Cut Off/Upper Kelly
Big Horn/Old Lady's Flats

Lifts and slide

Lifts consist of towers, a base station, a top station, cables and chairs. None of the existing lifts is historic, with the oldest (Rafferty Lift) dating from 1978. However, remnants of the 1946/1959 Snow King chairlift remain.

Old Snow King Lift (1959): In 1959 the original single chairlift (1946) was replaced by a double chairlift. This lift operated from the old lift station (described below) to what is now the observation platform at the summit. The old lift line started west of the current Summit lift and crossed it about three-quarters of the way up the mountain. The current observation deck was formerly the unloading area built for the double chairlift. The metal structure that supports the deck and the metal railings around the deck appear to be original, as is the concrete retaining wall to the east of the observation deck.

Figure 9: Unloading area for 1959 chairlift, now observation deck (Mary Humstone, 2011)

The current ski patrol cabin appears to have originally housed the top cable mechanism for the Snow King lift. One of the towers of the Summit lift (about three-quarters of the way up the mountain) appears to have been built on an older concrete pad which is in line with the old Snow King lift. It is likely that other remnants of the 1959 lift line could be found with further investigation.

Summit Chairlift (1981): The Summit Chairlift replaced the old Snow King chairlift (1946 and 1959); however, remnants of the Snow King chairlift remain.

Rafferty Chairlift (1978): Named after Neil Rafferty, this lift opened up new intermediate ski terrain and provided access to an enlarged Alpine Slide.

Cougar Triple Chairlift (1994): Built in 1994, this 2,435-foot-long lift opened more terrain for intermediate skiers.

Alpine Slide (1978): This 2500-foot-long plexiglass slide winds under the Rafferty lift.

Buildings – hospitality

Hospitality buildings provide food, lodging and other amenities to skiers and other recreationists. Most of these buildings have been built within the past 35 years.

Snow King Resort Hotel & Condominiums (1976): This 200-room facility was built by Western Standard Corporation, which purchased property at the base of Snow King for the express purpose of developing a resort hotel. Over the years the hotel has been a Ramada Inn (1976 – 1981) and an Americana Hotel (1981 – 1986); it is now owned by Snow King Holdings, LLC. The hotel retains almost all of its original features. The first Ramada Snow King Inn brochure describes the hotel:

Figure 10: Snow King Resort Hotel (Mary Humstone, 2011)

> Blending majestically into the lower slopes of Snow King Mountain, surrounded by the beauties of nature, is the Ramada Snow King convention center resort hotel. . . The spectacular Inn lobby is four stories high with mezzanines overlooking it from four levels. The fireplace lobby looks out through tall windows onto the Snow King Mountain ski slopes. . . The 40-foot high fireplace rises up the middle of the lobby, built of native Wyoming stone quarried near Dubois. A gorgeous 30-foot long "waterfall" chandelier hangs sparkling between the dining room and the lobby mezzanine.[25]

The hotel was designed to blend into the mountain, with its sloped roof lines, cedar-sided exterior walls and cedar-shingled roofs. Although the hotel is only 35 years old, it is in close to original condition and should be considered as a potential contributing feature in the future.

Snow King Center (1993): In 1992, Snow King Inc. donated more than an acre of land at the base of the ski area to the town of Jackson and entered into an agreement with the town and Jackson Youth Skating to develop a conference center and indoor ice rink, with the caveat that Snow King Inc. be allowed to manage the facility and use the rink for a conference center during the off season. The center consists

[25] Ramada Snow King Inn brochure (Roy Peck Collection, University of Wyoming American Heritage Center).

of a base lodge and cafeteria for skiers, headquarters for the Jackson Hole Chapter of the National Ski Patrol and an indoor ice rink that is used by the community at large. The center also functions as a convention center. At the time of this writing, a change in management of the property is underway.

Panorama House (c. 1960): A restaurant facility, called Panorama House, was constructed around 1960 at the summit of the mountain. Panorama House lies next to the Summit Lift, and is perched on the edge of the hilltop, facing northwest (called north for purposes of this description). A wood boardwalk leads to the building from the top of the lift. The 30'-by-60' steel-frame building has a low gable roof supported by steel trusses. The building is sheathed in metal siding and has a metal roof. It sits on a poured-concrete foundation, which is deeper on the downslope end of the building. Surrounding the building on three sides is a raised deck which has concrete decking on the north and west sides and wood decking on the east side. The deck is supported by metal posts set on concrete pads and has a metal railing. Three sides of the building have banks of 2-sash metal sliding windows, five on the east and west elevations and four on the north elevation. The east and west elevations also have two-leaf metal doors with upper lights. The south elevation has a single metal door and a non-original 3-light wood window.

Figure 11: Panorama House, c. 1960 (Jackson Hole Historical Society)

The building is in original condition except for the window on the south elevation, a microwave tower on the east end of the roof, and a new concrete-block basement under the north deck that appears to store electronic equipment.

Love Ridge Resort Lodges at Grand View Lodge and Spa (2010): This is a newly developed property to the north of the Snow King Hotel.

Snack shack (c. 1959): This is a small (5'-by7') wood-frame building that has been moved from its original location on the unloading platform for the old (1946/1959) Snow King lift, but otherwise retains its historic integrity. The building has a gable roof that is overshot on the south side, sheltering a wide service window and wooden shelf. The walls are sheathed in board-and-batten siding and the roof is sheathed with asphalt shingles. In the summer the building is used as a photo center, where visitors can purchase photos of themselves as they reach the top of the lift.

Figure 12: Snack shack (Mary Humstone, 2011)

Buildings – service

Service buildings are used to operate, store and maintain equipment.

Maintenance Shop (date unknown): To the south and downhill from the Snow King Lodge, on Vine Street, is a rectangular 27' by 65', gable-front maintenance shop. The walls and roof are sheathed in standing-seam aluminum. The façade has a garage door and a man door, and additional garage doors are found on the east elevation. Windows are 6-by-6-light sliding sash. A shed-roofed addition extends to the rear. It is possible that this building is more than 50 years old. Old lift chairs are stored in and around the building.

Figure 13: Maintenance shop (Mary Humstone, 2011)

Ski Patrol cabin (c. 1959): This building likely housed the engine and bullwheel for the top of the 1946/1959 Snow King lift. It is now used by the ski patrol. It is located in a direct line from the old lift station at the bottom of the hill. The front-gabled building faces north and has two oversized, two-leaf hinged doors which make up most of the north elevation. These doors appear to be original. The building sits on a concrete foundation. Exterior walls are sheathed in rough-cut board-and-batten siding, but wood shingles are visible beneath the newer siding. While most doors and windows are new, older 6-light windows are found on the east and west elevations and 1-over-1, double-hung windows are present on the south elevation. This building likely dates from the 1959 expansion period and could be historic.

Figure 14: Ski patrol cabin (Mary Humstone, 2011)

Old lift house (c. 1959) (part of 1-acre parcel sold by Snow King, now owned by Jim Walters): The old lift house is located at the west edge of the ski area, and is no longer owned by Snow King. The large bullwheel for the lift is reportedly still intact inside the building, although access was not available to confirm this during the field visit.

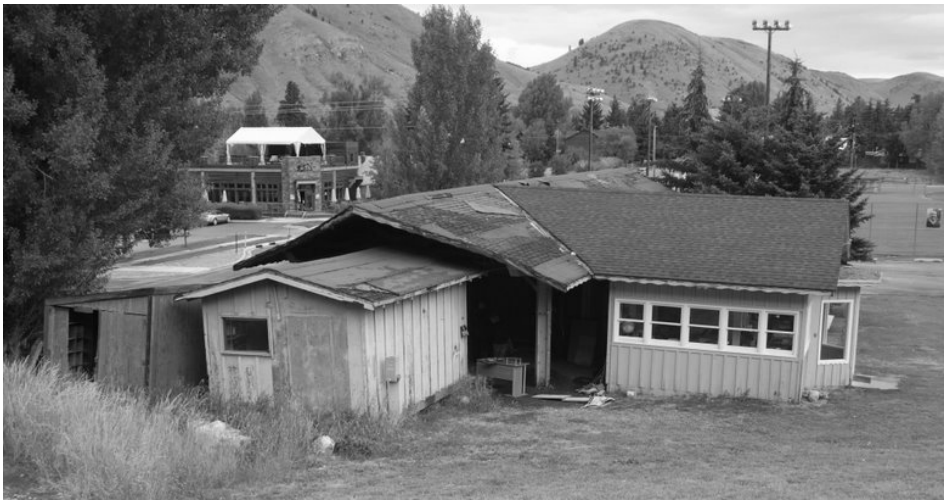

Figure 15: Old lift house (Mary Humstone, 2011)

The rectangular, gable-roofed building is constructed with massive wood posts reinforced with steel, and has a concrete floor. The roof at the south end shelters an open space that once housed the loading area. Walls are sheathed with board and batten siding, and windows (now boarded up with plywood) are flanked by wood shutters decorated with cut-out pine tree motifs. The steel posts that supported the lift system are still visible in the open section of the lift house.

A small gable-roofed shed has been shoved part-way beneath the overhanging roof of the lift house, and a shed-roofed shed lies to its west. An addition has been built to the east, and the building now serves as the base of operations for the winter tubing business. Although this building is historically significant, in its current configuration it lacks historic integrity.

Rafferty Lift Building (c. 1978): This 36'-by-26', eave-front, gable-roofed building houses a ticket office, storage and an upstairs apartment. The building rests on a concrete foundation, is sheathed in composite sheet siding with shingled gable ends and has a shake-shingled roof and metal windows. A shed roofed dormer and a wooden upper deck project from the south elevation.

Figure 16: Rafferty lift building (Mary Humstone, 2011)

Small ski-related buildings: Additional small buildings are found at the loading and unloading areas of the three lifts, as well as scattered on the mountain. Further examination is necessary to determine if any of these is historic. They appear to date from the 1970s and later.

Other landscape features

The Snow King Ski Area contains numerous small landscape features which contribute to the cultural landscape of the ski area. All of these are significant elements of the ski landscape, although not all of them are historic. These small-scale landscape features include trail signs, fences, small utility buildings, stationary snow-making equipment and lights (indicating night skiing). In addition, newly installed communication towers are now a prominent feature of the landscape and one that detracts from the historic integrity of the ski area.

Figure 17: Trail signs and other small landscape features contribute to the cultural landscape of the ski area (Mary Humstone, 2011).

Unrelated buildings

Kelly-Murie House (48TE1700) (c. 1920): Located near the Rafferty lift, this property consisting of a log house and garage is owned by Snow King but is a separate property not related to the ski area. It has been used as a residence and office, but is currently vacant. The property was determined eligible for the National Register in a 2005 Teton County Historic Site Survey.

Analysis and recommendations

Previous studies

Forest Service reports on the Snow King ski area dating from 1981, 1994, 1998 and 2002 were examined for references to cultural resources. These previous studies focused narrowly on archeological resources that might be found within the direct path of construction, as opposed to the cultural landscape approach that characterizes this study. All of the reports concluded that the area contains no cultural resources, although one report (McKay, 1994) states that there is the possibility that parts of Snow King could be significant to Native American tribes. The 1998 report noted the existence of the Panorama House but did not include any research on its history nor evaluation of its significance. In this same report, the 1959 lift unloading deck (now observation deck) and lift house were not mentioned.

Evaluation of historic significance

The Snow King ski area appears to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places as a rural historic landscape under Criterion A, with areas of significance in Community Development and Recreation. The ski area has played a major role in the development of Jackson Hole as a ski destination. Although later eclipsed by the Jackson Hole Ski Area, Snow King was the first ski area to be developed in Wyoming and early on established Jackson Hole's reputation as a ski town. Snow King has also played a major role in the culture and traditions of Jackson Hole, from fund raisers, carnivals and other community events to ski races and exhibitions.

Evaluation of historic integrity

As an operating ski area, Snow King has necessarily changed to keep pace with the changes in the sport of skiing, with new, faster lifts, wider trails, and updated ski facilities. However, while many of the character-defining features of the historic ski area have been replaced in the past 50 years, the mountain itself and the ski trails retain integrity as character-defining elements of the cultural landscape that have shaped the image and character of Jackson Hole since the late 1930s. Features described above that are more than 50 years old and retain historic integrity are also contributing features in the rural historic landscape. In addition to ski runs and trails, specific buildings and structures more than 50 years old include:

- Old Snow King lift line and unloading station (1959)
- Panorama House (c. 1960)
- Snack shack (c. 1959)
- Maintenance shop (date unknown)
- Ski patrol cabin (c. 1959)
- Old lift house (1959)

Recommended next steps

Further documentation - National Register nomination

If the Teton County Historic Preservation Board and/or the owner of Snow King wish to pursue a National Register nomination for the property, the following additional research and evaluation will be needed:

- Develop history and contexts for areas of significance (Community Development, Recreation).
- Determine period of significance.
- Locate and examine historic trail maps and narrative reports of skiing at Snow King to confirm dates of construction and historic configuration of ski runs and trails. Possible sources include the 1939 Teton National Forest "Recreation Master Plan" and subsequent plans.
- Determine the route of the 1936 CCC trail, and identify intact segments.
- Document construction and use of Panorama House and other buildings more than 50 years old.
- Document and map small landscape features such as trail signs, fences and small utility buildings.
- Document location, construction history and current condition of the 40-meter jump.
- Evaluate the historic integrity of all resources more than 50 years old.
- Determine boundaries.

Further research

Conduct oral interview with Manuel Lopez, who has served as general manager of Snow King since the early 1970s.

Preservation concerns

The 1959 lift house is no longer part of the Snow King property. Although this building has been significantly altered, it is still an important feature of the landscape, providing a physical representation of the early history of the ski area. It is recommended that the TCHPB contact the current owner, Jim Walters, to apprise him of the potential historic significance of the property and discuss preservation options.

Interpretation

The Snow King ski area has a fascinating history which is closely tied to the history of Jackson Hole and its development as a ski destination. Opportunities for on-site, internet and/or walking tour/brochure interpretation could be explored by TCHPB.

References consulted and cited

Newspaper and magazine articles

Clayton, Judy S. "Snow King plans fun-filled 50th bash" *Jackson Hole Guide,* 1/25/89.

Clayton, Judy S. "Snow King was state's first ski area" *Jackson Hole Guide,* 1/18/89.

Colquhoun, Laura. "Snow King chair was an eclectic rig." *Jackson Hole News,* 1/25/1989.

Jacobson, Liz. "Snow King's 70th anniversary: A tale of two managers." *Jackson Hole Historical Society Chronicle*, Winter 2008-2009.

McKoy, Wade. "Loyal to the King." *The Jackson Hole Skier Magazine,* 2004. http://www.focusproductions.com/HTML/skier_pages/skier7.htm; accessed 11/9/2011.

"Neil J. Rafferty" obituary. *Jackson Hole Guide,* 5/17/95.

"Out of the Past" [excerpted from June 1946 *Jackson Hole Courier*]. *Jackson Hole Guide*, 11/17/66.

"Proposed new winter sports set up" [photo caption]. *Jackson Hole Courier,* 8/17/39.

Sellett, Michael. "Snow King plans big bash for 50th," *Jackson Hole News*, 1/25/89.

Stanford, Jim. "Panorama House closure dismays hikers." *Jackson Hole News*, 8/11/99.

"The Town Hill," *Teton Magazine*, V. 6 (1973-74), pp. 18-65.

Books

Bonney, Orrin H. and Lorraine G. *Bonney's Guide: Grand Teton National Park & Jackson's Hole*. Houston: O.H. and L.G. Bonney, 1961.

Gonzales, David. *Jackson Hole, On a Grand Scale*. Boulder: Mountain Sports Press, 2001.

Huidekoper, Virginia. *The Early Days of Jackson Hole*. Boulder: Colorado Associated University Press, 1978.

Jackson Hole Ski Atlas. Jackson: Project X Publishing, 2010.

Landman, Joan, and David. *Where to Ski: Ski Guide to the U.S. and Canada*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949.

Lange, Dick and Fran. *Jackson's Hole—A Winter Adventure*. Jackson: Frontier Press Inc., 1963.

Pitcher, Don. *Moon Spotlight: Jackson Hole, Wyoming*. Berkeley: Avalon Travel, 2011.

Turiano, Thomas. *Teton Skiing: A History and Guide to the Teton Range*. Moose: Homestead Publishing, 1995.

Wieneke, Connie. *Jackson Hole: Crossroads of the West*. Helena: American & World Geographic Publishing, 1996.

Woods, Rebecca. *Jackson Hole Hikes*. Jackson: White Willow Publishing, 2009.

U.S. Forest Service Reports

"Snow King Chair Lift Cultural Resource Survey" (1981).

"Snow King Ski Resort Chair Lift, Waterline, and Skier Lane Improvements" (1994).

"Snow King Cellular Phone Tower" (1998).

"Snow King Fuels Reduction Project" (2002).

Other

Ina Rafferty Collection. Jackson Hole Historical Society.

"Jackson Hole, Wyoming" brochure (1948). Jackson Hole Historical Society.

"Neil Rafferty." Oral history by Jo Anne Byrd, 2/2/88. Jackson Hole Historical Society.

"Ramada Snow King Inn" brochure. Roy Peck Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

Smith, Greg. Personal interview. 9/16/2011.

"Snow King" Website. http://www.snowking.com/default.aspx; accessed 9/7/2011.

"Snow King" vertical files. Jackson Hole Historical Society.

"Teton National Forest Recreation Master Plan, 1939." From Karl C. Allan Collection (#7636), Box 5, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

Western Standard Corporation, annual reports (1972, 1979, 1980). Roy Peck Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

Acknowledgments

Research assistance for this report was provided by Cassidy Stickney. Shannon Sullivan, Curator of Collections for the Jackson Hole Historical Society, was very helpful in providing access to the collections of the organization's archives.

Front cover: photo of Snow King from Jackson, c. 1950 (Jackson Hole Historical Society); quote from "The Town Hill," Teton Magazine, 1973-1974, 20.