Robin Morning

History Award 2006

I have the opportunity to again write a letter of support for historian Robin Morning. Robin's work continues to provide our visitors and the community of Mammoth Lakes with unparalleled access to the rich, ongoing history of Dave McCoy and Mammoth Mountain Ski Area (MMSA).

Robin's archive, her research, her interviews, and her generous cooperation have yielded the following work over the past year:

- "From Independence to Chair One" This exhibition illustrates Dave McCoy's first generation in the Eastern Sierra from the mid-1920's to the incorporation of MMSA and the launch of Chair One. This exhibit was extended due to its popularity.
- An article on Dave McCoy and early rope tows in the Eastern Sierra for I.S.H.A's Skiing Heritage Magazine.
- Two articles for Mammoth Monthly Magazine about local Mammoth ski history:

  1. Phillip Mollard's legendary ski run down Mammoth Mountain,
  2. Winter of 1969.

- Robin was the emcee for a special event the museum held over the holiday period featuring Dave and Roma McCoy, Jill Kinmont and a dozen of living legends from early Sierra skiing. A capacity crowd of 275 guests enjoyed this event.
- Opening in June 2005, "For the Love of It...Skiing, Racing & Working on Dave McCoy's Mammoth Mountain: 1955-1969." This new exhibit expands the story of Dave, Roma and MMSA by introducing the family of skiers, racers and workers that build, shape and move MMSA from a one chair hill to one of the nation's most beloved ski operations by 1969.

This impressive list of a year's work does not begin to reveal the depth of Robin's contributions to skiing's heritage overall nor does it reveal the exciting future projects in development right now. It is the museum's hope that in the near future, Robin will be able to publish her account of Dave McCoy's story and have it sit next to the Mammoth Sierra Legend currently available to visitors!

If the committee has any further questions regarding this nomination, please contact me. Thank you for your consideration of historian Robin Morning for the FWSA Western Ski Heritage Award.

Enjoy & Explore the Fine Art of Skiing.

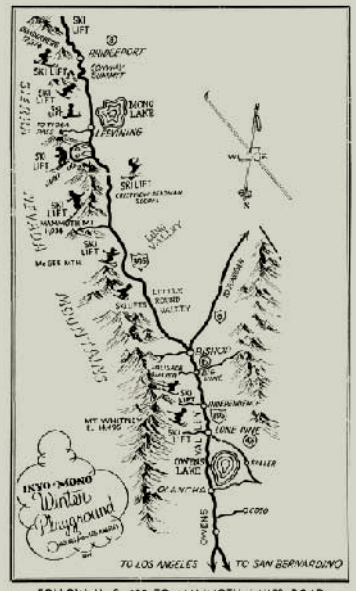
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The Journey Begins

Hard work. Access. Fun.

The following story of Dave McCoy, founder of Mammoth Mountain Ski Area, illustrates how one man's hard work has provided unparalleled access to skiing throughout the Eastern Sierra for well over fifty years. Historian Robin Morning has devoted years to Dave McCoy and to his story. The results of Morning's hard work fill this gallery, bringing local history to life and providing access into McCoy's world that until now has remained out of our reach. Have fun with this story - that is what McCoy and Morning wish for us in return for their efforts.

INDEPENDENCE



FOLLOW U. S. 395 TO MAMMOTH LAKES ROAD.

...to CHAIR ONE

Map design based on Alahu Resort brochure from the **Charlotte Zumpstein Collection**



Early Years - *Before 1935*

Born on August 24, 1915 the only child of Bill and Edna McCoy, Dave McCoy lived his first five years in the Southern California coastal town of El Segundo. In 1920, his father secured a job with Valley Paving, a road construction company in California's Central Valley. For the next ten years, the McCoys followed road construction jobs around the state, living a nomadic life, moving from tent camp to tent camp.

In July of 1928, Dave's mother took him to Independence, California, to visit her friends, the Coopers, who had recently relocated to the Eastern Sierra. During this short summer vacation Dave fell in love with the region's snow-covered peaks, high country lakes and the feeling of community he found in the small town. He secretly vowed to return and make the Eastern Sierra his home.

Two years later, Dave's parents separated and sent their fifteen-year-old boy to live with his paternal grandparents in the coal-mining town of Wilkeson, Washington. Throughout his high school years, Dave remained unsettled, hitchhiking between his grandparents in Washington and a friend's house in *(cont'd...)*



Young Friends
In El Segundo the McCoys frequently socialized with the extended family of Frank and Grace Cooper. A young Dave McCoy (left) and Owen Cooper (right) play together at a social gathering.



Early Engineer
Dave McCoy displayed an interest in mechanics at a young age. Here, he proudly organizes and photographs tools he used to build a scooter. His knack for mechanical engineering would later serve him well repairing rope tows and raising chair lifts.



Trucking
Bill McCoy played an active role in building the early highways in western California. Soon after moving to the Central Valley, he went into business on his own, selling the family car as collateral for a down payment on his first truck. The senior McCoy eventually owned a fleet of trucks that included four Sterling trucks, two Mack trucks, a Fresno Scraper and a Fortson Tractor.



Into the Snow
Bill McCoy first introduced his son Dave to snow country on family outings in the Western Sierra.



A Passion for Fishing
In Wilkeson, Washington, Dave's grandfather, Bob Cox, shared his love for fly-fishing with his grandson. Before long Dave earned a reputation as an expert fly-fisherman. When he started hand-tying flies, his creations evolved into a lucrative business catering to local fishermen. One of his fishing partners, Milt Allen, offered to exchange ski lessons for fly-tying lessons.



Beginner's Slope
Dave McCoy (middle) stands with his high school buddies Joe Logan (left) and Americo (Bosty) Bostenero (right). While living in the mining town of Wilkeson, Dave, Joe and Bosty became close friends. Together, they walked a mile each morning to catch the school bus, played sports in the afternoons and spent their weekends fishing and skiing.



Solo Jump
Dave McCoy built this ski jump on a hill near the mining camp. His friends didn't appreciate the steep landing, so Dave practiced solo.

Irwin, California. His love for athletics-the more competitive, the better-kept him enrolled in a school just long enough to earn a sport's letter. At the completion of a football, basketball or track season, the restless young man hit the road again.

In the summer of 1934, Dave and his high school friend Joe Logan drove from Wilkeson, Washington to Independence, California, in Joe's 1929 Model-A Ford. During this month long visit, Dave befriended local hydrographers from the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP). The fact that these men were being paid to work outdoors monitoring Eastern Sierra water entranced him. When Dave left Independence for the second time in his life, he made another secret vow: he would finish high school in Washington, return to Independence and become a hydrographer.

For the first time since eighth grade, Dave completed a full year at a single school. With this stability, he excelled scholastically as well as athletically. By the end of his senior year, four colleges had offered him football scholarships. Dave declined them all. The day after his graduation, he thanked his grandparents for their support, packed his football sweater and fishing gear, put his thumb out and hitchhiked to Independence.



First Day Skiing in the Eastern Sierra - *Winter 1935*
As soon as snow covered the slopes west of Independence, Dave McCoy asked Owen Cooper to drive him to Grays Meadow so he could try out his new handmade skis. Although Dave brought along his Brownie camera to document his first Eastern Sierra ski outing, that day he spent more time throwing snowballs than he did making turns.



Enthusiastic Skiers
Many residents of Independence shared Dave's enthusiasm for skiing. Local skiers spent their weekends chasing snowfields, often skiing off a portable rope tow built by Dave and his friends. Later in the evenings, the skiers shared stories and potluck dinners while drying out their wet Levis.

Independence

On Labor Day of 1935, three months after his high school graduation in Washington, Dave McCoy arrived in Independence, California, ready to start a new life in the Eastern Sierra. Within five minutes of his arrival he donned an apron and started washing dishes at the Coopers' popular restaurant, Jim's Place.

Ash Skis
Shortly after moving to Independence, Dave converted DWP employee Ben Boyd's garage into living quarters. To prepare for snow, he purchased a block of ash wood, shaped it into a pair of skis and ordered bindings and ski poles from a Montgomery Ward Catalogue.



On the Job at Jim's Place
Within minutes of arriving in his new home Dave put on an apron and started working.





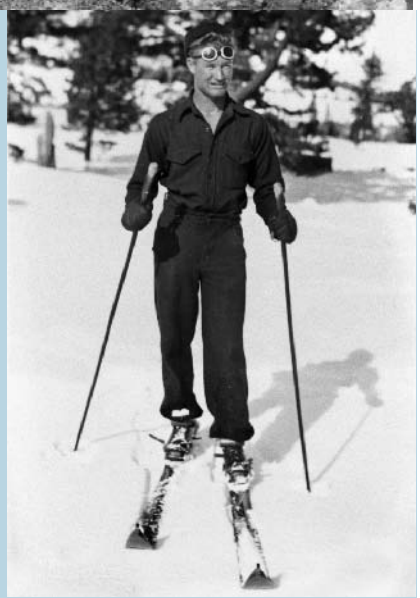
Mammoth Mountain Firsts - Spring 1936

In April of 1936, DWP hydrographers Vic Taylor and Ed Parker invited Dave to accompany them on a three-day snow survey of the Mammoth Lakes region. The men stayed at Tex and Ruth Cushion's Winter Patrol Station, located in what is today Old Mammoth.

Upon their arrival, the men found Tex skiing behind his house with aeronautical engineer Jack Northrop and the H.F. Rey family. Northrop had converted his car into a rope tow by using one rear wheel as a tow drive, thus creating the first rope tow ever used in Mammoth Lakes.

Impressed by Dave's skiing abilities, Cushion invited him to ski on Mammoth Mountain the following weekend. Without hesitation, Dave accepted.

Early morning on Easter Sunday, the two men left the Winter Patrol Station to climb the south side of Mammoth Mountain, McCoy's first experience on the snow-covered volcanic dome. At the summit, Dave signed the register and took a photo of his skis crossed against a rock cairn.



Dressed to Ski

Dave McCoy accompanied his DWP hydrographer friends on their snow-survey trip to the Mammoth Lakes region in April 1936.



Old Mammoth

The Cushion's Winter Patrol Station stood where the Snowcreek Tennis courts are now located in Old Mammoth. At that time, their dog sled teams provided the only winter transportation in the Mammoth Lakes region.

McCoy... and his Machines

Winter 1937



Helmets Save Lives
Dave's motorcycle helmet, sheepskin-lined with soft leather, like a fighter pilot's, proved valuable for many uses. It kept him warm while skiing and it might have saved his life one day while working on the aqueduct. A co-worker next to McCoy was having trouble cracking cement with his sledgehammer. Concerned about the inaccurate swings yet wanting to finish the job, Dave donned his motorcycle helmet for protection and told his co-worker to swing harder. The next swing smacked Dave on the side of the head, knocking him out.



Harley-Davidson Motorcycle
In 1937, Dave McCoy purchased a new black and white Harley-Davidson, painted a dragon on the front and rigged the bike to carry two pairs of skis and two fishing poles.



Heels Up
Dave takes off from the slopes of McGee Mountain.

In July of 1936, Dave McCoy secured a job with the Works Progress Administration (WPA) refurbishing sections of the Los Angeles Aqueduct. For transportation, he purchased a used brown and yellow 1935 Harley-Davidson. Deeply tanned and riding shirtless, wearing little round goggles, bellbottom jeans and a bandana tied round his head, Dave became a familiar sight speeding up and down Highway 395.



Corty Hill's McGee Upski
Over the weekend of January 16, 1937, a line of automobiles could be seen parked along Highway 395 near McGee Mountain. Their occupants were attending the grand opening of the "McGee Upski," an innovative ski lift designed by Jack Northrop, operated by Tex Cushion and financed by Cortlandt "Corty" Hill. This jig-backed lift featured detachable sling harnesses, which skiers wrapped behind their backs and hooked to an arm extending from the tow's cable.

Curious about anything having to do with skiing and ski lifts, McCoy strapped his skis and poles to his Harley and rode from Independence to the McGee celebration. That day, when the Upski faltered, McCoy stayed out in the cold with Hill and Cushion troubleshooting the problem.

Hill returned to Santa Monica impressed by the young McCoy. For the next few years, Corty took Dave under his wing, coached him in his skiing, supported him in his racing and offered to sponsor him in the Olympic tryouts.



Dave, Tex & Max
George Deibert, a Bishop pharmacist and avid sportsman, organized the Eastern Sierra Ski Club (ESSC). The Club relied on its members to maintain the McGee sling ski lift, especially men like Dave McCoy (left), Tex Cushion (middle) and Max Zischank (right). Photograph by **El Jordan**



A Clean Sweep - *March 1940*
Dave McCoy swept all of the men's events at the fourth Inyo-Mono Championships held on McGee Mountain. He carried home the coveted Hill Plate and pair of new ski poles as prizes. Roma Carriere walked away with the Deibert Cup for winning the women's giant slalom. Pictured in the background of this photograph is the ESSC rope tow.

Après Race at McGee

Photograph by **Ethel Vandegrift**

"Four hundred people attended including seventy-five racers. Many stayed until the last racer finished...Dorrance Keough opened up McGee Creek Lodge to serve lunches along with Mrs. Steffen at the fox farm...The three quarter mile course twisted down the steep slopes of McGee with Wolfgang Lert winning first place and Dave McCoy, the 'dark horse from Independence' coming in second. Fastest time in the first heat was Corty Hill...Dave McCoy also won the Class B race."

Inyo Independent, April 15, 1937

1st Inyo-Mono Championships!

On April 11, 1937, the first ski race in the Eastern Sierra, the Inyo-Mono Championships, took place on McGee Mountain. Local skiers raved about the occasion, praising event organizer Corty Hill for his contributions.

> "Mr. and Mrs. Cortlandt T. Hill have given so freely of their time this season in encouraging and instructing skiers and creating local enthusiasm for local sports...it was mainly due to their efforts that the first ski meet in this locality was a success."

Inyo Independent, April 15, 1937



Trophy
Corty Hill of Santa Monica, George Deibert of Bishop and Venita McPherson of Mono Lake each donated perpetual awards to the Inyo-Mono Championships. The Hill Plate went to the top male racer, the Deibert Cup to the top female racer, and the McPherson trophy to the top racer from Inyo-Mono Counties.





Upper Mammoth Course
As a DWP hydrographer, one of Dave McCoy's duties was measuring snowfall throughout the Long Valley region.

Dave and the DWP

Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP) - *Spring 1937*

Deep snows made it difficult for DWP hydrographers to complete their surveys in the Eastern Sierra. Needing the help of someone with strong physical stamina and excellent skiing skills, they put in a good word for their friend, Dave McCoy. Dave got the job. Shortly after being hired, the DWP sponsored McCoy in his first ski race, the Inyo-Mono Championships, and proudly publicized his racing success as their own.

The DWP hired Dave at the laborer's wage of $135 a month and assigned him responsibilities as an "unofficial" hydrographer. By summer, they relocated him to Bishop, California. Shortly after moving into the Bishop DWP bunkhouse, Dave started building a portable rope tow of his own.

During the summer of 1941, while construction of the Long Valley Dam neared completion, a newly married McCoy pushed through the final phases of his application to become an official DWP hydrographer. As a result of having studied for the civil service exam for four years, McCoy walked away with the highest score in his group of examinees and a job as the first hydrographer at the Long Valley Dam. The DWP raised Dave's salary to $160 per month, supplied him with a hillside bungalow overlooking the dam and assigned him the welcomed responsibility of monitoring DWP stations throughout Long Valley, including stations on Mammoth Mountain.



Photograph from **LADWP**

A Day in the Life-DWP
Dave McCoy performs the duties of a hydrographer, above. Dave's backcountry strength and excellent skiing skills helped him land a job with the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

Dave McCoy & the

From the late 1930's through the 1950's, rope tows dotted the slopes of the Eastern Sierra. Some rope tow operators ran their tows for personal use, some for business. But whatever the motivation, Dave McCoy ended up being the only one of these rope tow operators who remained in business and developed his tows into a long-term operation.

What was it that distinguished Dave McCoy from the other rope tow operators? Even those who suggest that he simply happened to be in the right place at the right time also note his exceptional personal attributes. Dave's work ethic, physical strength, mechanical creativity, determination, positive outlook and quiet, disciplined personality created a combination that could not be stopped by blizzard or drought.



Rope Tow Boom...



Photograph by **Daniel Phillips/Dave McCoy Collection**

Little Round Valley Lift

In the summer of 1939, after operating his sling ski lift on McGee Mountain for two seasons, Corty Hill received complaints from Pete Steffen. Steffen owned a fox farm located directly across Highway 395 from the tow. The foxes had started to eat their own offspring and Steffen blamed the problem on noise from the skiers.

Wanting to avoid a lawsuit, Corty hired local resident Happy Jack Partridge to disassemble the McGee facility and rebuild it in Little Round Valley, several miles south of McGee, where Aspen Springs is located today.

Hill gave his McGee Forest Service Permit to Ma Yerby of Tom's Place. Then he leased and renovated Tom's Place as a clubhouse for members of the "Wooden Wings," his new private club for celebrity skiers from Hollywood. In the spring of 1941, after two years of poor snow conditions, Hill's Little Round Valley ski lift closed down.



Photograph courtesy of **Tom "TJ" Johnston**

The Tow Truck

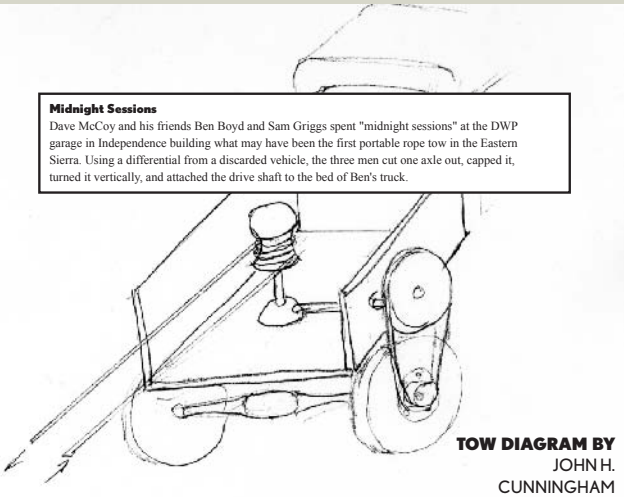
In 1939, after Corty Hill dismantled his McGee Upski, members of the Eastern Sierra Ski Club (ESSC) secured a Forest Service permit to install a tow of their own on a site located partway up the McGee Canyon access road, a half-mile away from Steffen's fox farm.

Using a motor donated by Sam Griffith of Bishop, ESSC members Bill Young, Claude James and Dave McCoy built a permanent rope tow for the new location. ESSC leader George Deibert organized several ski club work parties and placed a want ad for "lumber or a small building that could be used as a shelter, either donated or for a reasonable price." By the end of January 1939, the club had installed a 1,200-foot tow and built a ski hut that featured a new oil stove. The club voted McCoy and James in charge of keeping the new, yet temperamental, rope tow running.

In February 1941, a visiting skier from Los Angeles offered to build a bigger, more efficient tow for the ESSC. Howard More had successfully built such a tow for the Seven Springs Ski Area in Pennsylvania. For $725, he offered to do the same for the ESSC. The club closed the deal via telegram. Club members and Bishop High School racers helped with the installation and More had his tow up and running by the promised deadline of Easter Sunday, April 13, 1941.

Not only did McCoy take a leadership role operating the ESSC's permanent tow on McGee, but he also operated his own portable tow that he had built at the DWP bunkhouse in Bishop. When Ma Yerby passed Corty Hill's original McGee permit on to him, Dave built a small shed and outhouse and ran his tow on McGee Mountain.

EASTERN SIERRA **ROPE TOW** TIMELINE



Midnight Sessions
Dave McCoy and his friends Ben Boyd and Sam Griggs spent "midnight sessions" at the DWP garage in Independence building what may have been the first portable rope tow in the Eastern Sierra. Using a differential from a discarded vehicle, the three men cut one axle out, capped it, turned it vertically, and attached the drive shaft to the bed of Ben's truck.

TOW DIAGRAM BY JOHN H. CUNNINGHAM

1930's

COMPILED BY CHRIS LIZZA & ROBIN MORNING

1935-36 Independence (McCoy & friends)
April 36 Old Mammoth (Jack Northrop)
1936-38 McGee (Northrop, Hill and Cushion)
1937
- Mammoth (Santa Monica Ski Club)
- McGee Lodge (Dorrance Keough)
- Conway Summit
- Mt. Whitney (Hans Georg)
- Crestview (Clarence Wilson)
- June Lake east end (Gerth Brothers)
- June Lake Lodge (George Conn)
- Whitney Portal (Jack Hopkins)
- Devil's Gate (Mono Ski Club)
- McGee (ESSC)

1937-38 McCoy builds portable
1938-39 McGee South - ESSC (McCoy & friends)
- Old Mammoth (H.F. Rey family)
- Lee Vining (Mono Ski Club
- Conway Summit (Ed Heathe)
- Crestview (Clarence Wilson)
- West Portal (DWP employees)
- Independence (Vic Taylor & friends)
- Oh Ridge in June Lake
- Glacier Lodge in Big Pine
- Whitney Portal
- Various places on Mammoth/Observation Pt./ Terry's Run (McCoy)

1938-40 Little Round Valley (Corty Hill)

1940 - 1945

1940-41 Old Mammoth (Tex Cushion)
- Observation Pt. (Lloyd Nicoll)
- Shady Rest (Bill Reed)
- McGee & Mammoth (McCoy)
- McGee (ESSC- Howard More tow)
- Long Valley Resort (Nan & Max Zischank)
- Dream Mtn. at June Lake (George Conn)
- Lee Vining (Mono Ski Club)

1941-42 McGee & Mammoth (McCoy)
- Back of Long Valley Dam (McCoy)
- Fern Creek (Almour family)
- Observation Pt. (Nyle Smith)
- Shady Rest (Bill Reed)
- Old Mammoth (Tex Cushion)
- Old Mammoth (Rey family)
- Crestview & Deadman's (Clarence Wilson)
- Long Valley Resort (Nan & Max Zischank)
- Lee Vining (Mono Ski Club)
- Independence (Vic Taylor & friends)

1943-45 McCoy runs tows for visiting servicemen
1944-45 Long Valley Resort (Nan & Max Zischank)
- Old Mammoth (Tex Cushion)
- Old Mammoth (Rey family)

THIS TIMELINE IS AN ONGOING WORK OF HISTORY



Photograph by **J. Watson Webb, Jr.**



Photograph from the **Don Coons Collection**

1946 - 1947

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS TIMELINE PROJECT ARE WELCOME

1945-46 McGee (ESSC)
- Long Valley Resort (Nan & Max Zischank)
- Crestview (Perry Wilson)
- Lee Vining (Walt Dombrowski & Augie Hess)
- Onion Valley (O.K. Kelley & Vic Taylor)
- June Lake (June Lake Winter Club)
- Fern Creek (Chuck & Doris Osborn)
- Lake George (Nyle Smith)
- Crestview (ESSC)

May 1946 Top of Mammoth (McCoy 5 tows)
1946-47 Mammoth (McCoy w/Howard More portables)
- Mammoth (McCoy's McGee tows on Broadway)
- Conway Summit (Augie Hess)
- Lee Vining (Mono Ski Club)
- Fern Creek (Chuck & Doris Osborn)
- Fobe's 40 (Robert Connell – Rey's tow)
- Glacier Lodge (Pete Holmes)
- Onion Valley (O.K. Kelley & Vic Taylor)
- Observation Pt. (Hans Georg)
- Observation Point (Hans Georg)
- Crestview (Al Bloomfield & Ray Schutt)
- Lee Vining (Mono Ski Club)
- Fern Creek (Chuck & Doris Osborn)
- Onion Valley (OK Kelleys & Vic Taylor)
- Conway Summit (Augie Hess)

1948 - 1960

* EXACT DETAILS OF OPERATION UNCERTAIN AT PRODUCTION

1948-49 Mammoth (McCoy – four tows)
- Horseshoe Lake (McCoy portable) *
- Observation Point (McCoy portable)
- Observation Point (Hans Georg)
- Crestview (Al Bloomfield & Ray Schutt)
- Lee Vining (Mono Ski Club)
- Fern Creek (Chuck & Doris Osborn)
- Obsidian Dome (Chuck & Doris Osborn) *
- Onion Valley (OK Kelleys & Vic Taylor)
- Conway Summit (Augie Hess)

1949-50 Bishop Creek (Craig & Milovich)
- Mammoth (McCoy – four tows)
- Horseshoe Lake (McCoy portable) *
- Observation Point (McCoy portable)
- Observation Point (Hans Georg)
- Crestview (Al Bloomfield & Ray Schutt)
- Lee Vining (Mono Ski Club)
- Fern Creek (Chuck & Doris Osborn)
- Onion Valley (OK Kelleys & Vic Taylor)
- Conway Summit (Augie Hess)

1950-54 Mammoth (McCoy)
- Observation Point (Hans Georg
- Lee Vining (Mono Ski Club) *
- Fern Creek (Chuck & Doris Osborn)
- Onion Valley (OK Kelleys & Vic Taylor)
- Conway Summit (Augie Hess) *

Circa '55 Old Mammoth (Barker family)
1960's Onion Valley (Tommi Tyndall)

Photograph from the **Rey Collection**

* A Note to the Reader:
Some images, formatting and text may be lost due to the compression of this exhibit panel.
- Curator



Mammoth Mountain Summit - *May 30, 1938*
Dave McCoy hiked to the summit of Mammoth Mountain to ski with Don Patterson (left) and another unidentified friend (seated, foreground).

Day Trips

Marshall Carriere

On days there wasn't snow on McGee, Dave either hauled his portable tow to higher elevations or took a day trip, hiking and skiing, alone or with a few friends, usually exploring the slopes of Mammoth Mountain. In the spring of 1937, while passing through Bishop on his Harley-Davidson, twenty-two year old Dave McCoy stopped by a clothing store on Main Street called The Toggery. He struck up a conversation with the jovial sales clerk, Marshall Carriere. Discovering they shared a passion for fishing and skiing, the two boys sought out further adventures throughout the Sierra. Dave photographed Marshall one afternoon while skiing on Mammoth Mountain.



A Year of Major Events: 1941 - 1942

On May 10, 1941 Dave and Roma McCoy married in Yuma, Arizona.

In less then one year, ***four major events*** *would forever change their lives.*

1. Dave and Roma McCoy went into the ski business. That October, Dave used one of his motorcycles as collateral to purchase a used, portable Sweden rope tow that he immediately rebuilt. McCoy then secured a year-to-year roving permit from the U.S. Forest Service that allowed him to run a portable tow anywhere from Bishop to Bridgeport.

Shortly after purchasing the tow and a week before Dave's next paycheck, the couple ran out of money. Rather then be upset, Dave devised a plan to get them by for the week. **He told Roma to collect fifty cents from each skier** who came to ride the rope tow the next morning. Roma panicked, fearful and embarrassed to ask for money, but Dave insisted. He offered her his fishing creel to use as a cash box.

The next morning Dave set his tow up on the north side of Mammoth Mountain. To Roma's great relief, not one skier complained about the fifty cents. On the contrary, they were glad to pay for the privilege of riding the rope tow.

After a few hours of "selling tickets," Roma walked behind a tree and carefully counted the money. To her amazement, she had collected fifteen dollars. She could hardly maintain her composure. When Dave skied by, she called him over, opened the fishing creel and grinned. **Then she whispered, "We eat!"**

2. In October 1941, just as the DWP started to fill the empty basin of Crowley Lake with water, the McCoys moved into the DWP bungalow above the Long Valley Dam. By late November, **Roma realized she was pregnant with the couple's first child.**

3. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Dave and Roma had been skiing with friends on the north side of Mammoth Mountain. Around mid-day, Dave walked to the car to pick up the lunch Roma had packed. Just by chance he turned the radio on and heard the news.

There would be no more skiing that day. Dave packed up his rope tow and drove home to Crowley Lake. The couple lay awake all night listening to the radio broadcast.

4. Exempt from the first-round of the draft because he was married and a father-to-be, Dave had a window of time to decide how he would serve in the war. **With an uncertain future ahead of him, he entered one last ski race,** the 1942 California State Championships. Dave never crossed the finish line.

Racing the downhill, Dave took a terrible fall, shattering his left leg. The doctors wanted to amputate. **"Lose a leg or lose your life,"** they warned, but Dave refused to accept their diagnosis.

The doctors went to Roma and Dave's mother Edna for consent to amputate. The women did not budge, **"If Dave says he's keeping his leg, then he's keeping his leg."**

The War ends-Skiing returns - Summer 1945



Dave McCoy anticipated that war veterans would return to ski the Eastern Sierra and he wanted to be ready to serve them. He designed two identical rope tows, had them fabricated in Los Angeles and hauled them to McGee Mountain on a rented trailer. With help from a few friends, McCoy installed the tows' engines at the top of the rope tows, an innovation he thought might haul skiers more efficiently.



Scenic Postcard
For most of the post-war skiers who flocked to Dave McCoy's McGee rope tows, Crowley Lake stood out as a new addition to the Long Valley landscape.



Mc Gee Warming Hut - *Summer 1946*
Working late into the nights, Dave and his friends built a warming hut using construction materials discarded by the DWP. The artist who created the logo is none other then Dave McCoy.



Chain Saw - *Summer 1947*
Swinging double-edged axes, Dave McCoy and his friend Don Redmon spent months clearing Broadway of trees and debris and filling in a huge gully that cut down the center of the run.

Coincidentally, after sixteen years of separation, Dave reconnected with his father, Bill McCoy. The senior McCoy, who had been logging in northern California, gave his son a precious and much appreciated gift, a chain saw.

Tows on Mammoth Mtn.

When McGee Mountain lacked snow, Dave McCoy headed north to Mammoth Mountain in his 1941 Chevy coup. The toboggan base of his trusty portable tow stuck out the trunk and junior ski racers from Bishop packed the inside. With the help of the racers and visiting skiers, Dave spent the first part of the day breaking trail along a snow-covered Minaret Road. Then the group hauled the rope tow up to a skiable slope. On good days, the tow was up and running with enough daylight left for the skiers to make some turns.

During this time period, Forest Service representatives were assessing potential sites for the development of winter recreational opportunities in the Eastern Sierra. Although Mammoth Mountain consistently made the list of strong candidates, potential investors' enthusiasm dimmed when they read the results of a 1946 study sponsored by Corty Hill. Hill's study concluded the following about Mammoth Mountain: **see listing >>>**

Regardless of the formal study, Dave's commitment to Mammoth Mountain never faltered. With his portable rope tow and his roving permit he ventured to the north side again and again.

- **Had too much wind**
- **Had too much snow**
- **Had too much elevation**
- **Had too much avalanche danger**
- **Was too isolated**
- **Was located too far from a major highway**
- **Was too odd of a shape - making it difficult to funnel skiers to a central terminal.**



The Snake Pit

During the fall of 1948, Dave McCoy built a warming hut near his Mammoth rope tows. Always the improviser, he substituted pumice for sand to mix concrete, prefabricated pieces of the structure in the DWP garage at Long Valley Dam and used Jim Wilson's GI Dodge truck to haul the pieces up to Mammoth. With friends and the junior racers helping, Dave assembled the building on site in a single weekend.

Although the building looked great in the summer, winter storms soon buried its sixteen-foot roof. In order to enter the hut, a person had to slide down a curved track of snow - thus the name "Snake Pit." To exit, skiers climbed a steep set of snow-cut steps. Dave's volunteer ski patrolmen referred to the structure as "The Dynamite Pit" because of explosives that sometimes needed to be stored there.



Skiers Riding Mammoth Tow

Early on in his career as a ski lift operator, Dave McCoy established a positive working relationship with the United States Forest Service. In 1947 local representatives fully supported his application for a yearly permit to run temporary tows in a permanent location on Mammoth Mountain. With this ten dollar permit Dave installed one of his McGee tows at Mammoth on a slope he called Broadway. He named the rope tow Number One.

Weasels

Snow on the north slopes of Mammoth meant snow on the winding, five-mile Minaret Road, making it impassable to most automobiles. In December of 1947, Dave heard about an auction in San Diego in which surplus Army Weasels were to be sold. A Weasel is a tracked vehicle equipped with a six-cylinder engine that could transport fifteen people. Believing these vehicles could solve the difficulties of getting skiers up Minaret Road, Dave and Roma attended the auction. They returned home the proud owners of three Weasels.

The solution for one problem meant the creation of another. To keep the Weasels running, Dave frequently spent Friday and Saturday nights on the floor of Rich Thompson's Mammoth garage repairing the vehicles.

Photograph from **Jill Kinmont Collection**



A Father

to his Family...

During the twelve years Dave and Roma McCoy lived at Long Valley Dam, their immediate family grew to include six children: **Gary (Punkin'), Dennis (Poncho), Carl (P-nut), Penny, Kandi and Randy.** Their extended family grew to include numerous friends and junior ski racers. On Friday and Saturday nights, the McCoys' tiny bungalow burst with the sounds of laughter and roughhousing. When the noise settled around 9:00 pm, tired bodies crashed in sleeping bags across the living room floor.



Skiing-A Family Affair
No one enjoyed skiing on the McGee rope tows more then Gary, the McCoy's young son. Gary didn't need ski instruction. He simply imitated the way his father moved around on skis. Dave had found it easier to maneuver around on a pair of long boards then to walk on his chronically painful broken leg.

In this photo (left), Gary sports one of numerous sweaters his mother Roma hand-knitted while waiting for her husband to return home in the evenings. After completing his DWP tasks, hunting wild game for food and working on the rope tows, Dave often didn't get back to the Crowley house until two or three in the morning. Roma could see McGee Mountain from her bungalow window. When she saw the lights finally turn off, she would put her knitting down and re-warm dinner for her husband.

Household chores, pregnancies and six children could not keep Roma McCoy away from the slopes. More then once, she raced while in her third trimester of pregnancy, finishing as one of the top female skiers in Inyo-Mono Counties.



The McCoy Children - *circa 1950*
From left to right stand Poncho, Gary, Penny and P-Nut with the family dog. Not pictured are Kandi and Randy.

A Coach

...to young Racers

As the seasons passed, Dave spent more and more time coaching the Bishop Ski Team. During the heavy winter of 1951-52, he drove a carload of Bishop racers to Winter Park, Colorado, to represent the Far West Ski Association in the invitational Junior National Skiing Championships. While watching the best junior racers in the country compete, Dave couldn't help but think he could coach racers to the top. He felt sure he had a winning formula: a group of high-energy enthusiastic kids and enough snow on Mammoth Mountain to be able to train into the summer months.

Two years later, Dave's Bishop racers dominated the 1954 Junior Nationals in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. As winners of

Photograph from **Kenny Lloyd Collection**



Lone Skier
Dave spent much of his time and money coaching ski racers, considering the racers an integral part of his life. Their labor force helped keep the tows running properly, their race results gave Mammoth recognition in the ski world and their youthful energy matched his own. But most of all, he just plain old loved ski racing.

During high school, Kenny Lloyd proudly raced in his hand knitted Bishop Ski Team sweater. Along with his fellow junior racers, Kenny helped Dave run the rope tows, carried gasoline up to engines at the top of the tows, shoveled ski ruts from under the towline, ski packed the slopes, hauled aggregate in the summer and basically performed whatever task Dave asked of him. In return, Dave coached Kenny and the other racers, drove them to races and paid for most of their racing expenses.

Photograph from **Don Coons Collection**



Dave's Racers
Right, top: Aime Morehardt's Bishop Race Team. Right: Dave and one of his Far West race teams.

PROSPECTUS *A Blueprint for the Dream*

In 1951, the United States Forest Service released a prospectus to develop Mammoth Mountain for winter recreation. As the deadline, April 30, 1953, approached, not a single bid had been submitted. Without financial support, Dave McCoy did not consider himself a candidate.



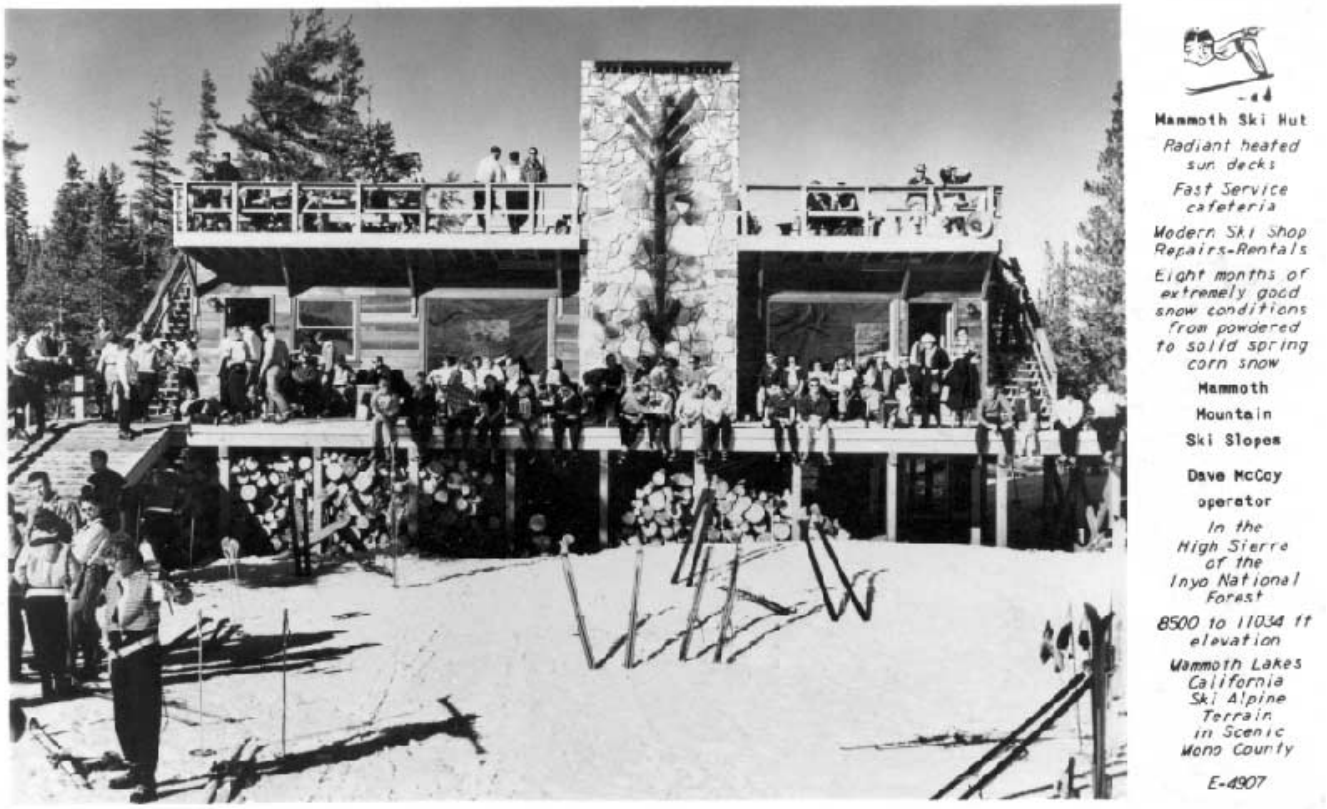
Meanwhile, Inyo National Forest Supervisor Slim Davis had closely watched McCoy's growing ski operation. Slim outright told Dave that he should be the man to do the development. He asked Dave, "Can you do it?"

Dave didn't hesitate to answer, "I'll do my best."

McCoy then drew an outline of the mountain on a blank piece of paper and added three lines representing three chair lifts. On April 15, 1953, he attached this drawing to a handwritten proposal and submitted the package to the Forest Service asking for a permit to develop Mammoth Mountain.



August 11, 1953, after four months of push and pull politics, Slim Davis received an official letter from the United States Forest Service issuing the term permit for further development and operation of Mammoth Mountain Ski Area to Dave McCoy.



The Lodge at Mammoth Mtn.



Dear Grandpa
Dave McCoy wrote his grandfather Bob Cox this postcard in May 1954 telling him about the new warming hut that had been built.

Dave McCoy realized that to meet the requirements of the Forest Service permit, he had to give full attention to developing and running his ski area. In mid-November 1953, less then two weeks after Roma had given birth to their sixth child, thirty-eight year old Dave sent a letter of resignation to the DWP and moved his family to the ski lodge at McGee.

On the evening of December 3, 1953, Dave and Roma attended a retirement dinner held by the DWP in honor of Dave's sixteen years of service.

Phase I

Dave McCoy completed the first phase of construction on a new lodge at Mammoth just as the winter of 1953-54 approached. The ground floor of the 30 x 60 foot lodge featured a small office for business and ticket sales, restrooms, a first-aid room and a few rooms for sleeping. The second floor consisted of a spacious lobby with a fireplace, a dining room, cafeteria and flush toilets. Compared to the Snake Pit, skiers considered Dave's new lodge "The Ritz." They especially enjoyed the sundecks on the roof and front porch.

"THE PLACE TO BE"
Dave took great pride in the long black arrow pointing down the exterior of the lodge's rock fireplace. He had designed this arrow to inform skiers, "This is the place to be." With his family helping, he gathered multicolored rocks from the Hot Creek area for the fireplace and pure black rocks from Westgard Pass for the arrow.

Phases II and III
Over the next two summers, Dave made significant improvements to the lodge. Phase II (right) and Phase III (far right) detail the changes.





Dave & Jill



Photograph by **Stephen Lukacik/Jill Kinmont Collection**

After winning both the Junior and Senior National races in 1954, Jill Kinmont dedicated herself to becoming the best ski racer in the world. First goal: the 1956 Olympic Team.

Rather then attending dances and school activities, she spent her weekends with the McCoy family at their McGee Creek Ski Lodge, helping Roma cook, babysitting the kids and training with Dave. In the mornings, she helped Roma sell rope tow tickets. In the afternoons, she skied, often with June Lake's Dennis Osborn, who was also trying out for the team.

As soon as Dave could break away from working on the tows, he joined the racers. Jill followed Dave down the mountain, right on his tail, pretending his precise tracks were a slalom course. She chased him through high-speed giant slalom turns, ignoring the bite of snow shooting off the back of his skis into her face. For downhill practice, she challenged herself each run to start higher up the slope and carry more and more speed over bumps Dave had shoveled.

Jill followed Dave hiking to the top of Mammoth, digging her boots into the snow as they climbed up the steep overhanging cornice. Dave didn't hesitate to drop off the lip onto the steep slope, so Jill hid her fears and pushed off behind him, gaining confidence in her ability to handle sudden acceleration and high speed.

At the end of January 1955, Dave drove Jill to her first pre-Olympic try-out race at Alta, Utah. He sang happily to the radio as they sped along the highway, confident that his protégé was in top form for the competition. He had no premonition of the life-changing event that was to occur, that partway down the course, **Jill would take a horrendous fall and become paralyzed.**



Photograph from **Jill Kinmont Collection**

Jill's accident shook Dave's world. Loving her as a daughter, a friend, a companion on the mountain, he wanted to do everything he could to help her, but there was not much he could do.

When Jill visited Mammoth during the fall of 1955, Dave carried her around the mountain, showed her the progress of construction on Chair One, and offered her the job of running the new Sport Shop. She declined the offer and went back to Southern California to pursue an education.

Dave respected Jill's decision. He stood back and watched with tenderness and pride as she moved forward in life, watched her getting an education, learning to drive, becoming a teacher and an artist. In a sense, their roles reversed. Constantly inspired by Jill's resilient spirit, Dave became one of her many admirers.



Photograph by **LA Times/Special Collections UCLA**

Chair One

Summer 1955

Dave McCoy and a group of about twelve muscular, hardheaded full-time employees built Chair One.

The raggedy crew accomplished so much so fast that Walter Martignoni, the owner of United Tramways who supplied and financed the chairlift fell behind in sending supplies.

McCoy and his men utilized sheer determination, mechanical creativity and long hours of overtime to compensate for their lack of experience and equipment.



Photograph by **H.F. Haemisegger**

Chair and Dave

In the fall of 1955, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a feature article on Dave McCoy and his new chairlift.

Building Chair One

Ralph Baschelder and other work men (left) clear snow during the construction of Chair One.

Below, a portable cement mixer helps McCoy's men set Chair One's lift towers.

