

## **MT. DIABLO SKI CLUB - AN HISTORICAL ACCOUNT AS REMEMBERED BY MEMBER FRED HILL, c. 1993**

The original group that organized the Mt. Diablo Ski Club in 1948 were skiers who lived in Antioch, Pittsburg, Brentwood, Concord, and the Walnut Creek area. In December 1953 they incorporated as a California Non-Profit Club and drew up the original charter which said the Club was organized to "develop and foster an interest in skiing, to provide the necessary facilities and a ski club, and to offer social and recreational activities attendant to winter sports."

It was hoped most members would live within twenty-five miles of Walnut Creek so they could attend meetings and participate as officers, board members, etc. Some members were from as far as San Francisco, Sausalito, Modesto and Berkeley.

Dues were ten dollars for a single member and seventeen dollars and fifty cents for a couple or family, per year. The number of members varied from year to year; sometimes near one hundred. It was a lively, young, mostly single, integrated group. In 1962 the roster showed fifty-seven single and sixteen family memberships: a total of seventy-three.

In the fall of 1960 Fred Hill joined after seeing an ad in the local Walnut Creek paper placed by Frank Sellers. With the dues that were collected, a cabin committee each year rented a cabin for January, February, and March, and decided if they should take a chance on snow in April. Each year they were likely to have to rent a different place.

The club rented the Hayden Cabin on the hill above the Bear Pen (a restaurant and bar) at the entrance to Squaw Valley next to the Post Office for the winter of 1960-61. There was little parking on the narrow road so most cars were left at the Bear Pen. If the road was not plowed, you carried your stuff up the mountain side. That cabin later burned down.

In the winter of 1961-62 the group rented a cabin on Dollar Point on Lake Tahoe. It was a nice cabin but had problems with access when the road was not plowed, and also had very little parking.

The Club moved to Carnelian Bay on the North Shore of Lake Tahoe for two years in 1962-64. This had a nicely finished basement apartment which the club furnished free to a hippie and his girlfriend as cabin housekeepers (and who left leaving a large phone bill for the club to pay.) A bad experience with a full-time housekeeper modeled after what the Oakland Ski Club was doing.

In the late 1950's the club had bought an old army barracks for three hundred dollars from Fort Stoneman in Pittsburg which a few members spent many hours tearing down for building material to build a future cabin. This pile of lumber, water heater, etc. was put in a member's backyard where it sat many years with the termites enjoying it. After many requests by the member for the club to move it, it was finally donated to him.

Every summer Frank Sellers, Fred Hill, Dick Couchot, and others would look for property to build a cabin on. They looked at many sites at Donner Lake, Squaw Valley and Donner Pass. At that time Dick Couchot was driving a black Corvette and courting Janet.

The building committee talked to Wayne Poulson who owned land in Squaw Valley across the creek from the Olympic Village under the present gondola and drew up a purchase agreement. A husband and wife in the club who were both architects from Alamo drew up a beautiful set of plans. An A-frame with large front porch and front entrance above snow level on the second floor, a recreation room downstairs, fireplace, bedrooms, baths and kitchen on the second floor and a loft for additional sleeping space.

The lot in Squaw Valley for this A-frame design was level and the #1 original Squaw Lift was just across the road. The one hundred twenty-five passenger gondola now goes over the lot. The sales contract left open the amount of future assessment to build a sewage disposal plant and then hooking up to it. No one had any idea how much this would cost or how we could pay for it, so we gave up the idea of a cabin in Squaw.

Every year it had become harder and harder to find a suitable house big enough to rent for the winter months. Skiers had a bad reputation for damage, partying, and hard use of rented cabins. The owners frequently kept the five-hundred-dollar damage deposit they all required. For example, at the Hayden place in Squaw the front door fell off the hinges and we were charged for it.

A realtor named Mr. White, working for Swanson Realty in Truckee, showed the cabin search group the cabin we now have. It had been on the market two or three years and had been rented by Berkeley Ski Club, so the price was reasonable. Vincent Lyddane from Woodside, California was the owner.

The approximately 0.73 acres the cabin is located on was deeded by the Central Pacific Railway Co. on May 6, 1930, to J.O. Jones and D.H. Jones. A second deed dated August 15, 1930 was executed by J.O. Jones, D.H. Jones, and Bertha B. Jones to Dr. J. Roy Jones, a dentist, who appears to have built the cabin in the early 1930's. A third deed dated Jan. 2, 1936 was executed by J.O. & Berta B. Jones and D.H. Jones, to J. Roy & Hetty B. Jones, that the property cannot be used for any business purpose such as a dentist office before Dec. 31, 1951 and if this condition is breached the title will revert back to J.O. Jones and D.H. Jones

The deed to Vincent Lyddane on the property was dated Oct. 2, 1958.

A Ski Club meeting Sept. 21, 1964, at the Sportsman's Lodge in Walnut Creek, presided over by the President Dick Couchot, (and missed by Treasurer Fred Hill who was on vacation) Bill Cameron presented all available information on the cabin and Paul Gual Presented financial proposal for buying the cabin. Frank Sellers made a motion, and it was seconded that the club purchase the Lyddane cabin. After more discussion, Frank changed his mind and withdrew his motion to purchase the cabin.

A little later Paul again moved, and it was seconded to purchase it. All of those present at the meeting who were members the prior year then voted, fifteen yes and two opposed. The motion carried. Those present were advised the club had made a deposit on the cabin to hold it till November 15th and members and guests could use it until November 1st by making a call to the Cabin Chairman and paying fifty cents a night during this time.

The club had \$1,625.00 in the treasury at that time.

Mr. Lyddane wanted five thousand dollars down and the group tried several banks including Wells Fargo who the club was banking with for a loan on the balance and all the bankers laughed. "A loan to a constantly changing group of ski bums whose officers changed every year with no visible assets? Who would be responsible for paying the mortgage payments?" they all asked.

Mr. Lyddane said if we came up with five thousand dollars down he'd carry the mortgage for \$18,500. for thirty years at 7% at \$125. per month for the principal and interest. The going mortgage rate was 4% at the time so this seemed pretty high, but we had no other choice. It was paid off a little early in March 1993.

Interest on the loan of \$18,500 for twenty-eight years seven months; three hundred forty three payments was \$24,271.71. Total cost of the cabin including down payment, Federal excise tax, interest, and principal was \$48,771.71. A first-class stamp in 1964 cost four cents to put the value of a dollar in perspective.

One original active member, Bill Cameron, a French Canadian who owned a sport shop in Lafayette, had a friend named Neil Diamond, a lawyer in San Francisco, who drew up the legal papers for seventy-six dollars and handled the sale for the ski club.

The Internal Revenue Service at that time had a twenty percent excise tax aimed at well- to-do golf and country club revenues and some other non-profit sports clubs. There were, however, some exceptions, like tennis clubs, swim clubs, and several other types of clubs, but they forgot to exempt ski clubs, so we had to come up with six thousand dollars; one thousand for excise tax and five thousand for the down payment.

The officers figured if we could get fifty people to put up six thousand dollars, we could swing it. Dick Couchot was president and Fred Hill the treasurer that year. By 1993, they were the last two remaining members of the original group.

Dividing fifty into six thousand determined the cost of membership, plus ten dollars dues and twenty dollars to guarantee collection of cabin charges, which was where the original one hundred fifty dollars buy-in came from.

A letter was sent to the seventy-three current members (57 singles, 16 family) plus many past members, but only sixteen had paid by the deadline of October 15<sup>th</sup>. Thirty-one paid by November 5<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Lyddance, under our deposit of earnest money, agreed to wait till November 15<sup>th</sup> for the total down payment.

We had to have at least forty we felt or it was no go. We had a quick drive to sell nine more memberships. Frank Sellers bought two. Fred sold one to a neighbor. Frank sold another to Skip Walters, a fellow skier, who owned the Sport Chalet in Pleasant Hill (now Oshman's). He wanted to put the membership in the name of the Sport Chalet, but was told no. The organizers found a few others, till finally we had thirty-seven paid and bought the cabin. We then had to raise enough money to pay the mortgage of one hundred twenty-five dollars a month, taxes, insurance, utilities, maintenance, etc. To avoid paying twenty percent excise tax on money collected over ten dollars maximum for dues, we had to leave the dues at ten dollars and call the rest fees, etc.

The mortgage conditions said we could not make any structural building improvements without approval until it was paid down to fifteen thousand dollars. The cabin when purchased had one bedroom and bath downstairs and two bedrooms and bath upstairs plus one large open dormitory. Each bath had a tub, tin shower, and one wash bowl, and one bare light bulb in each room – circa 1930's.

We removed the tubs at an early work party, added a second wash bowl and partitioned the toilet spaces. The new showers were installed in 1990.

The dormitory was divided up into a hall and four bedrooms early in the 1970's by the work parties.

The old garage made of snowshed railroad timbers with no foundation was about to fall down so instead was torn down and replaced by the new entrance building.

The Federal Government stopped snow plowing on old Highway 40 when Interstate 80 opened in 1960. The state took over plowing for a few years then turned it over to the county. The county, after Proposition 13, pleaded poverty and tried to set up a snow plowing district to assess property owners between Hwy 80 and Donner Summit approximately three thousand dollars a year for plowing. This was defeated so the county stopped plowing the shoulders of the road for parking. We had to excavate to lower the grade about five feet and pave the parking area about that time. A one-hundred-dollar assessment of each membership was made to pay for these improvements and was added to the one hundred fifty dollar value of each membership.

After the club bought the cabin, on Saturday nights this very lively social group would go across the street to Beacon Hill Lodge (downhill from Soda Springs Lodge and which later burned down) or Soda Springs Lodge (now condos across the street) for drinking, dancing to live bands and socializing with other neighboring skiers.

Occasionally the group would all go to North Shore Hotel for gambling or Squaw Valley Lodge for dinner. The club members did many social things together as a group in these earlier days while at the cabin.

We joined Berkeley Ski Club and the Skolers from Hayward for a Tri-Club Fun Ski Race each year at Sugar Bowl and afterwards one club would host an open bar and dinner. Each club took turns being host.

Groups from the club took trips to Alta and Sun Valley. For several years a club group would go to mammoth for their Spring Ski Festival over Memorial Day and a swim in the hot springs that came up in the middle of the river near Mammoth.

Summer outings at the cabin for hiking, swimming, barbeques were an annual affair. Bill Cameron kept a canoe in the garage and there was a small boat for paddling, fishing and falling into Lake Van Norden that used to be in the meadow across the Highway from the cabin until PG&E owned the dam and blew it up and drained the lake to appease the environmentalists [sic].