

**Pioneers on Skis: Life in the Yampa Valley**

Isolated by substantial annual snowfall—which was measured by the number of fence wires covered—the area's early settlers adapted to being snowbound during “three wire winters” by clamping on skis, then known as *Norwegian snowshoes*. Used for transportation throughout the region as early as the 1880s, ranchers wore them to feed cattle, mailmen to deliver mail, and students as well as teachers to get to school.

The *snowshoes* were handcrafted from white pine or spruce. Ranging in size from eight to fourteen feet in length, they were four to six inches wide, and at one inch thick, weighed twenty-five pounds. A single, long pole served the dual-purpose of a steering rudder and brake.

It wasn't until 1900 that the term *ski* replaced the word *snowshoe* in Colorado. It took another ten years and Captain Carl Howelsen's ski sailing feats in the Barnum & Bailey Circus to change the course of skiing from a practical means of getting around to a recreational and world class sport.



Official Barnum & Bailey poster featuring Captain Carl Howelsen

**Olympic Heritage Walking Tour Map**

Carl Howelsen and skiing enthusiasts of Steamboat Springs, 1915

Howelsen Hill is the oldest ski facility in continuous use in Colorado; is the largest and most complete natural ski jumping complex in North America; and is the only ski area listed on the Colorado State Register of Historic Properties as of 2008.

**LEGEND**

- WALKING TOUR
- BRIDGE or UNDERPASS
- RESTROOMS
- YAMPA CORE TRAIL

**OLYMPIC HERITAGE WALKING TOUR HIGHLIGHTS**

- 1 Start your tour at the Tread of Pioneers Museum, which features a comprehensive history of skiing exhibit.
- 2 Take 8th Street to the corner at Lincoln Avenue where you'll see skiing pioneer Carl Howelsen's stone mason work on the Routt County National Bank (802 Lincoln Ave.) and the Furlong Building (810 Lincoln Ave.) The stone was quarried above Howelsen Hill.
- 3 Cross Lincoln Avenue and look right to the edge of town and Woodchuck Hill. Now home to Colorado Mountain College, historically it is the site of Carl Howelsen's first ski jumping exhibition in Steamboat Springs during the winter of 1913.
- 4 Walk up Lincoln Avenue to 9th Street, turn left and head toward Howelsen Hill. (During early February, Lincoln Avenue is the site of many *Winter Carnival* events which combine the ranching and skiing heritage of Steamboat Springs.) After crossing Yampa Street take the Yampa Core Trail across the Yampa River on the 9th Street pedestrian bridge and follow the parking access road to the base of Howelsen's famous hill.
- 5 During summer months, you may see athletes jumping on the plastic covered HS75-meter jump.
- 6 Inside the Howelsen Hill Lodge you'll find a main floor exhibit featuring key local Olympians. Upstairs, in Olympic Hall, you will find the name of hometown competitors and medalists from winter sports, as well as kayaking and rowing, denoted by the host flag of the country in which they competed.
- 7 To experience the view from the top of Howelsen Hill, take the Barrows Chair Lift.
- 8 Dr. Rich Weiss Park on the Yampa River is named for Steamboat Springs' Olympic kayaker.



Skiing enthusiasts with Carl Howelsen in Steamboat Springs

**Carl Howelsen: History on Skis**

Norwegian Carl Howelsen, dubbed “The Flying Norseman,” arrived in Steamboat Springs in the winter of 1913 carrying a pair of skis and an unshakable passion for skiing. Local Marjorie Perry had enticed the Barnum & Bailey ski jumping sensation to put on an exhibition in Steamboat Springs. His daring ski jumps on Woodchuck Hill and his joy for the sport instantly propelled him and skiing into the heart of the community.



Kids cruising Lincoln Avenue in the early 1900s

In 1914, Howelsen moved into a cabin, just north of town, in Strawberry Park. On a hill behind his home, he built a wooden take-off plank and started teaching local kids how to launch from the jump on their wooden skis. His dedication to the youth of the community is still felt in an organization he founded, now known as the *Steamboat Springs Winter Sports Club*. The town continues to celebrate snow during the annual *Winter Carnival*, and the traditions of ski jumping and cross country skiing remain firmly rooted in Carl Howelsen's legacy in Steamboat Springs.

**Ski Jumping: In Pursuit of Flight**

Plummeting down a roller coaster track may be the closest most of us will ever come to experiencing the rush of ski jumping. Hometown Olympian, Todd Lodwick describes the exhilaration of ski jumping as, “jumping out of a ten story building and landing with grace.”

For the men and women ski jumpers on Howelsen Hill, the thrill of gravity-defying speed and airtime is a culmination of athleticism and tenacity. Competitors average 500 to 800 jumps per year in pursuit of perfecting distance and stylistic technique. Advanced aerodynamic positioning and gear have increased flight distance since Carl Howelsen first jumped. But the courage to jump remains a true constant of the sport.



View from the top of Howelsen Hill's plastic covered HS75-meter jump

Howelsen Hill scores high marks with the US Nordic Combined and Special Jumping Ski Teams, which regularly train on the historic site. Athletes test themselves on the: HS127-, HS100-, HS75-meter jumps and during summer months on the plastic covered HS75-meter jump. Kids, starting at age six, progress from small snow hills to the HS20, HS28 and HS42- to the higher-meter jumps as they become more skilled. (“HS” stands for Hill Size.)

**Winter Sports Club: Focusing on the Next Generation**

Howelsen Hill is the place where kids and community come together to play. Every weekday after school during ski season, girls and boys arrive to participate in the winter sports programs of Alpine Skiing, Nordic Ski Jumping, Cross Country, Biathlon, Freestyle and Snowboarding.

The Alpine Skiing and the Snowboard Teams are the two largest programs in the *Winter Sports Club* and the Freestyle Ski program is one of the oldest and most prestigious in North America.

Following in Carl Howelsen's tracks, the *Winter Sports Club* coaches, many of them former Olympians, channel the energy of youth into skiing and ski jumping programs which emphasize a lifetime enthusiasm for skiing. In 1944, the Steamboat Springs school system was the first in the country to accredit skiing as part of the curriculum.



Winter Sports Club programs, “Start ‘em young and make it fun.”

The *Little Toots* program of the *Winter Sports Club* introduces kids, starting at the age of three, to Alpine skiing; the *Mini Vikings* program initiates four-year-olds in cross-country skiing skills, and the *Little Vikings* launches five-year-olds into the Nordic Combined techniques of ski jumping and cross-country skiing. Coming up through the ranks of the *Steamboat Springs Winter Sports Club* programs, participants of all ages gain self-reliance and discipline on and off Howelsen Hill.

\*Local Lucy Bogue, *Colliers*, 1955

**Development Pipeline: Road Map to Maximizing Ability**

**Age 0 – 6:** With a focus of having fun, children learn basic athletic motions, strength, flexibility and fitness.

**Age 6 – 9:** Fun continues to be a major focus of learning coordination, balance and agility while building strength and speed. Teamwork and fair play are stressed.

**Age 9 – 12:** Young athletes learn skills across a variety of sports as a foundation for all future development. Strength, flexibility, agility, coordination, balance, speed & endurance as well as fundamental skiing skills are emphasized.

**Age 11 – 14:** Development of sport specific skills and fitness. As kids discover aptitude and enjoyment, competition is introduced at the local and state level.

**Age 15 – 16:** Athletes begin to optimize specific sport skills toward competing. Refinement and the acquiring of tactical skills is the focus. Competition is used to rehearse skills at the national and international levels.



Ski Jumper launches from the take-off on Howelsen Hill

**Age 17+:** Excellence in all aspects of the athlete's specific sport is the goal. Athlete grasps race day mental strategies for international competition. At age 17 – 20, the athlete is mastering skills while refining psychological, fitness and competitive skills for international competition. Mastery of skills and highly sophisticated psychological preparation and conditioning is the focus at age 20+ for competition in World Championships and the Olympic Games.

**All Ages:** Sport and activity remain an important and positive part of life, and athletes are encouraged to give back to the sport as coaches and mentors.



Carl Howelsen leaps from Howelsen Hill

### Steamboat Springs: Olympic Heritage

Tracing the course of Olympic heritage within Steamboat Springs reveals a town dedicated to engaging youth in the pursuit of snow sports and welcoming world class athletes to the community.

Ski jumper John Steele was the first Olympian from Steamboat Springs. He started skiing with Carl Howelsen at the age of nine, and at the age of twenty-three became Colorado's youngest competitor in the 1932 Winter Olympics. Local Gordon Wren strapped on skis at the age of three and later became the first American to qualify in all four Olympic skiing events. He was also the first American to break the 300 foot ski jumping barrier—a record he set on Howelsen Hill in 1950.

Alpine skier Buddy Werner, the first American to win major international skiing awards—including the prestigious Holmenkollen in Norway—carried the name of Steamboat Springs to the world. The Holmenkollen is Norway's highest skiing award, and signifies top placings in international events. Werner was killed in an avalanche in 1964.

Continuing the international awards legacy, local Johnny Spillane became the first American to win gold at the FIS Nordic World Ski Championships in Val di Fiemme, Italy in 2003.



Alpine Olympian Buddy Werner

### The Olympic Experience: In Their Own Words

*"I never look back. If I crash this week, what the hell? There's another race coming up next week. If I ski as hard as I can, maybe I'll win it."*

Buddy Werner Alpine/Slalom / Downhill, GS 1956 1960 1964

*"Before Buddy [Werner] we had no idea that we could beat the Austrians. We decided that if we could keep up with Buddy on the slopes, then there was no reason we couldn't keep up with the Europeans."*

Jim 'Moose' Barrows Alpine / Downhill 1968

*"The thing that was amazing for them is that they did it on their own. They proved to young kids in Steamboat Springs and throughout Colorado that if you had the heart to do it, you could."*

Loris Werner Jumping Alternate, Alpine/Downhill 1964 1968



Alpine Olympian Caroline Lalive



Snowboarding Olympian Tyler Jewell

*"In the end, it should never come down to any one success or failure that defines you. Instead, it's the accumulation of all your experiences, the journey, that has changed you over time for the better. That is maybe the most important victory which we can all take from our Olympic experience."*

Todd Wilson Nordic Combined 1988 1992

*"A jump happens in seven to eight seconds. I mean it's that fast. Your take-off happens at three meters on a jump which is nine feet and you're going sixty miles an hour. Three meters goes by fast—but that's what you have to react to."*

Todd Lodwick Nordic Combined 1994 1998 2002 2006

*"I was just hoping to come out and have a good time. To make the Olympics was way beyond my expectations this year. I thought if I skied my best for a couple runs, that would be a great day. To end up second behind one of the greatest moguls skiers ever, it's the ultimate Olympic experience, pretty much."*

Travis Mayer Free Style / Moguls 2002 2006



Nordic Combined Olympian Todd Wilson



Freestyle Olympian Travis Mayer

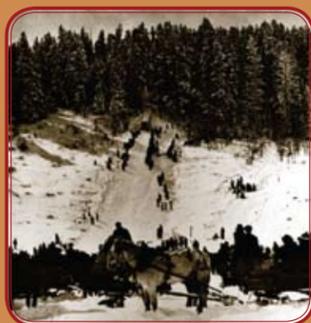
*"Skiing is a small world but it's a testimony to the importance of putting aside differences and embracing the beauty of athleticism and greatness. There will always be disagreements in our world yet I pray there is always the world of sports, where one is judged by talent, hard work and courage."*

Caroline Lalive Combined / Downhill / Slalom 1998 2002 2006

*"I jumped on alpine skis for a long time—sliding off the jump with my alpine skis. I finally started using jumping skis when I was about thirteen."*

*"Todd [Lodwick] taught me how to be a good competitor. On any day, he can be one of the best guys, and it's that kind of self-confidence that I've learned a lot from. I've learned don't ever count yourself out."*

Johnny Spillane Nordic Combined 1998 2002 2006



Steamboat Springs community gathers to watch ski jumping on Howelsen Hill, 1915

### Howelsen Hill: Leaping into History

Recognizing the record setting possibilities of the steep north-facing hill across the Yampa River from downtown Steamboat Springs, skiing pioneer Carl Howelsen built a ski jump on its slopes for the 1915 Winter Carnival. On his first test run of the hill, he jumped 127 feet. In comparison, Orville Wright's first piloted airplane flight in 1903 lasted 12 seconds and covered 120 feet.

Howelsen's hill, later named for him, launched a skiing jumping and skiing legacy of enduring institutions in Steamboat Springs including: the *Winter Carnival*, the *Steamboat Springs Winter Sports Club*, and a tradition of instilling winter sports as a lifelong pursuit in young local athletes and aspiring Olympic competitors.



View of Howelsen Hill and the Yampa River

*"There is a reason why Steamboat Springs has so many Olympians, and it's not because we have exceptional athletes or anything else. It's because we have an entire town working hard toward the same goal."* Johnny Spillane, Nordic Combined Olympic Team

Rising as a visual icon in the community's backyard, Howelsen Hill is a family oriented ski area where generations of local kids have learned to ski alongside world class athletes. There are more Olympic athletes in Steamboat Springs than any other town in North America.

*Jump into the skiing history and community traditions of Steamboat Springs on the **Olympic Heritage Walking Tour**.*



After taking the tour, see if you know the answers to:

- What is a "three wire winter"?
- What were Norwegian snowshoes?
- At what age do kids start ski jumping in Steamboat Springs?
- Who was the Flying Norseman?



For more information about the Olympic Heritage Walking Tour or cultural heritage tourism in Steamboat Springs please visit or call:

- *Tread of Pioneers Museum at 8th and Oak, which features a comprehensive history of skiing exhibit* 970.879.2214 [yampavalley.info/treadofpioneers.asp](http://yampavalley.info/treadofpioneers.asp)
- *Olympian Biography Project* [yampavalley.info/history7343159.asp](http://yampavalley.info/history7343159.asp)

Historic photos courtesy of the Tread of Pioneers Museum.

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Cover photo: Winter Carnival on Howelsen Hill by Matt Stensland



# Olympic Heritage

## WALKING TOUR

