

University News and Features

Covering the Campus

Reminder of Greats of Past

John Muir Knoll & Muir Tree

Historic Campus Ski Slide Is Only a U. Memory Now

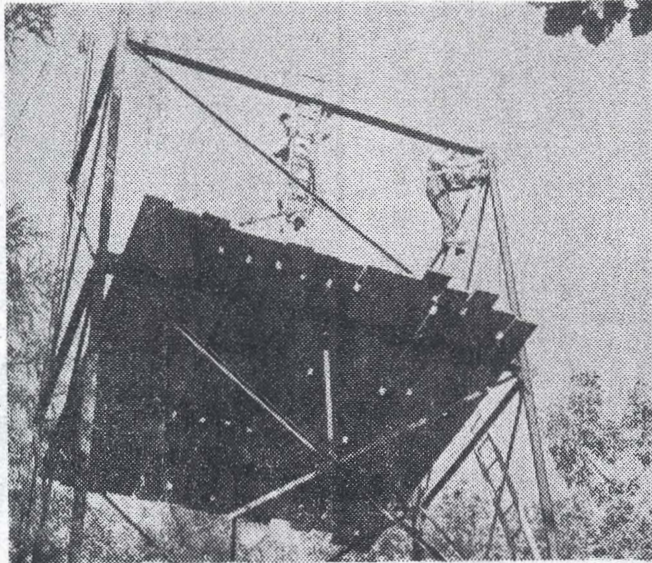
By MYRON BERGENSKE

With the dismantling of the giant ski slide, the last remnant of an historic era has left the University campus. For many years this structure had been a proud symbol of the days when it had helped to build Wisconsin's skiing immortals.

The steel frame slide which stood on Muir Knoll overlooking Lake Mendota has been uprooted and will soon be located in Hoyt Park just behind Hoyt School overlooking the limestone quarry. There, perhaps, it will still serve as a reminder of the days of championship jumping at the University and a symbol of hope for those who wish to see those days return.

In the winter of 1919, during the Christmas holidays, a group of skiing enthusiasts constructed a wooden slide on the knoll under the direction of several Norwegian students. Students were quick to use the new facility, and in the same winter there was a dual meet between Minnesota and Wisconsin with the Badgers coming out on top. This was the year that the University Ski Club was born. Later, in 1931, the club was enlarged to include other activities and the name was changed to the Hoofers.

The winter seasons meant extensive use of the slide during the 1920's, but by 1930 the slide had fallen into disrepair and was condemned. A newspaper column of that time contained this note, "But just at the critical moment when you could almost hear the old bones of the noble giant rattl-



The Muir Knoll Ski Jump on the University of Wisconsin campus overlooking Lake Mendota is now a thing of the past. Employees of the city park department are shown dismantling the steel structure, which they are re-erecting in Hoyt Park. The steel slide was erected in 1932, replacing an earlier wooden slide. (Photo by Tom Barlet)

of heroes came galloping up armed to the teeth with picks and shovels, hammers and nails, enthusiasm and hope (of raising \$2,000)."

Leading the group was Dr. H. C. Bradley, advisor to the Ski club and University professor, and Porter Butts, director of the Memorial Union. Close behind were the charter members of Hoofers. at the time Dr. Bradley said, "I am not willing to see the sport go from our campus without a fight." To back up his statement he and other interested persons contributed \$300.

The class of 1932 donated \$700, the Union Board another \$300, and still another \$300 was raised from the proceeds of two ski tournaments. The \$1,600 which had been collected was transformed into a steel giant which stood 56 feet high and tipped the scales at 55 tons.

On a Saturday, in February of 1933, the new slide was dedicated in the presence of Governor A.G. Schmedemann, University Pres. Glenn Frank, Madison Mayor James Law, and Porter Butts.

Soon the decade of Wisconsin's reign over ski-dom was well underway. The "Flying Bietelas", Paul and Walter, and later Ralph, brought Wisconsin and the Hoofers to world wide fame in the late 1930s. Paul became world-famous at 15, a world champion at 18, but his career was cut short by a fatal skiing accident in Minneapolis and he died in 1939.

The advent of World War II brought the activities of the Ski Club almost to a standstill. The skiing experts were drafted to teach ski troopers, and without these leaders the thoughts of the students turned away from skiing. After the war some interest remained, and the Wisconsin team took third place in the Intercollegiate meet of 1947.

Then in 1951, Porter Butts received a letter from vice president of the University, I. L. Baldwin, asking that the Hoofers use the Blackhawk Ski Jump so parking space could be developed.

In 1955 it was estimated the slide needed \$400 worth of repairs, and it was closed down Jan. 11. In February, Mr. Jacobson of the Blackhawk Ski Club suggested moving it to Hoyt Park.

And so today the slide soon will stand in a new spot, to continue to remind Madison and the University what it has meant to their history.