

The Sierran

— A Publication of the Sierra County Historical Society —



Lodge at Yuba Ski Land from top of ski hill, circa 1960

Yuba Ski Land

By Virginia Lutes, with excerpts from Vic York, Dick Alvarez, Olivia McCaffrey, Rick Maddalena and Mike Buck

No sign remains of the location of the Yuba Ski Land lodge, nor are their many visible traces of an area that played a large part in the memories of my generation of children who grew up in Sierra County. As you travel Highway 49 between the eastern and western sections of the county, pause at the top of Yuba Pass for a moment and consider that during the mid-1950's to late 1970's there existed a small ski lodge. Drive past the Forest Service campground from the sno-park parking area and look to the right (south and east). The lodge was located near the bottom of a hill, to your right. A rope tow was on the left side and a second rope tow was on the steeper part of the hill on the left side. Here, many learned to downhill ski due to the efforts of Vic and Audrey York.

The York's had spent a number of summers in Sierra County. Dick Alvarez remembers that Vic had a "pilot camp for children" in 1951, at what is now the San Francisco State University Biological Field Station near Carvin Creek.

Yuba Ski Land was designed and built by Vic and Audrey York. Planning began prior to 1956. Vic began by working with the US Forest Service to obtain a Special Use Permit to operate a ski lodge and rope tows. After four months of planning, drafting and negotiating with the Forest Service, the use permit was obtained in August of 1956. Work began immediately on the construction of the lodge and upper rope tow, using rough-sawn lumber from the Holstrom saw mill in Sattley. Used automobile parts were also used. In late February, 1957, the York's opened the upper hill for skiing on weekends. The lodge was not yet complete, but it was closed-in from the weather and offered a functioning fireplace. The lodge was completed and a "bunny tow" was added in the summer and fall of 1957. That fall, the Sierra County Road Crew constructed the rock and gravel parking lot at the top of Yuba Pass, making it possible for the State Highway Crews to remove the snow. The York's started to bring youth groups from the Bay Area in the spring of 1958.

Vic York taught at San Francisco State College (now San Francisco State University), and with that connection, he brought beginning skiers to the Yuba over spring vacation and Christmas semester break. Dick Alvarez: "I was in college when Vic and Audrey built Yuba Ski Land. Later, in the early 60's, I often collected Vic's kids at the chartered busses in San Francisco and Berkeley, kept track of them when we stopped for food at The Milk Farm on the way to and from Yuba Ski Land, and did useful tasks between skiing at Yuba Ski Land".

Olivia McCaffrey from Sierraville became acquainted with Vic York through San Francisco State College, during the late 1950's. "Ski classes were available for P. E. credit during Christmas and Easter vacations ... The classes would stay at Camp Leonard which is still located on Highway 49 about a mile up from Bassets. We would be bused up to the top and then had to walk in about a quarter of a mile to the lodge. Vic also brought in school and church groups for "learn to ski"

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— THE SIERRA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY —



The Sierra County Historical Society is an organization of people interested in preserving and promoting an appreciation of Sierra County's rich history. The Society operates a museum at the Kentucky Mine in Sierra City, holds an annual meeting, publishes a newsletter and conducts historical research. Members are sent notices of Society activities, receive THE SIERRAN, and are admitted free of charge to the museum and stamp mill tour. If you would like to become involved in these activities or would just like to give your support, please join us!

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Membership in the Sierra County Historical Society is open to any interested person, business or organization. Members need not be residents of Sierra County. Dues are due and payable each January for the calendar year.

Membership categories are as follows:

INDIVIDUAL	\$20.00
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Please send dues to: S.C.H.S. Membership Chairperson, PO Box 54, Sattley, CA 96124

Summer's Just Around the Corner!

The Kentucky Mine and Museum will open for Memorial Weekend at 10am on Friday, May 24th. We will be open Wednesday thru Sunday from 10am until 4pm, closed Monday and Tuesday. The Kentucky will remain open for the summer, closing on Sunday, September 1, 2013. Virginia Lutes and Judy Lawrence will be there to greet you. Remember, with your paid membership to the SCHS, you receive free museum access and tours of the Gold Mine, Miner Cabin and Stamp Mill.

Volunteers are always appreciated. If you have a few hours or a day a week you would like to volunteer, please let us know. Besides being a docent for the tours, there are many ways you can help, from greeting museum visitors, working the gift shop, to paperwork, such as accessioning donations to the SCHS. We need you! If you know of anyone planning a family reunion, a car club visit, school visit etc. to our area, remind them they can rent the park for the day for their event.

This season our fundraiser will be one concert event. On July 13, Mumbo Gumbo will be at the Kentucky amphitheater. This has always been our largest draw, and with cutbacks, we have decided to just have one event this season. Tickets will be available at the Kentucky, local vendors, and at our website, www.sierracountyhistory.org. We hope to see you this season!



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weekends. He would use college students to help teach, run the ski tows, and cook for the groups. After I had taken the ski class a couple of times, my sister and I started working for Vic and spent most weekends at the lodge during the winter. After a storm, everyone would have to go out and “pack” the ski hill by sidestepping up and down the hill. We had many happy times at Yuba Ski Land. (A romantic sideline: Olivia met her husband Larry McCaffrey at the Yuba Ski Land).

Vic worked with local families to bring children to the Ski Land on weekends to learn to ski. Chuck Hardesty and the McCaffrey’s from Sierraville, the Groggin’s from Downieville and the Brett’s from Sierra City, brought children up and helped them to learn to ski. Starting with the 1958-59 season, the York’s offered free skiing to Sierra County elementary school children when accompanied by a responsible adult. Locals did not visit YSL in large numbers, but more of the parents did make an effort to bring the children to the Ski Land. Chico State University used the hill for classes that Christmas and spring vacation and for the following five years.

Milt Gottardi, a teacher at Loyalton High School, started bringing bus loads of students, known as the LHS Ski Club, to the Yuba Ski Land in 1964. Vic remembered that this was a well-organized program using skiing students as instructors for the beginners. Mike Buck, currently residing in Loyalton, was one of those instructors. He remembers, “There were a couple of us that took lessons on how to teach skiing at Squaw Valley. It was great. We got out of school for a week. We taught a lot of beginners the basics, probably the hardest thing to teach was knowing how to use the rope tow. Vic would put on a lot of ski races at the Yuba ski hill. We invited Portola school because at that time they also had a ski program, between the Bechen’s, Hardesty’s and myself we took a lot of medals home.” That program really got the Sierra County children into skiing.

Many of those who took classes at the Yuba, and some who were employed as students, have various memories of their time at the Ski Land. Mike Buck also relayed this memory: “After a hard day of skiing we got to the parking lot only to find that there was no truck to haul our ski equipment down to the Pioneer Lodge where we were spending the night. So, Gottardi had the bright idea of hiding our ski equipment under the college bus that was up for the weekend. We figured we would get up there way before the college bunch

got up. But, when we got there, no bus! We held our breaths and walked over to where we had hid our ski equipment. We could not believe that the equipment was still laying there on the ground and the driver had not run over one thing! Of course Milt (Gottardi) wasn’t a bit surprised as he said a little prayer before leaving our ski equipment under the bus, so he said.”

Rick Maddalena began working for the York’s at about age 14. Vic began to use Sierraville kids to work; at that time some others employed were Eric and Kurt Scholberg. Rick remembers that the Hardesty and Scholberg families were very active at the Yuba. The Forest Service in Sierraville employed Chuck Hardesty and Carl Scholberg both, and the families put in a lot of personal time to make sure the place ran well. Vic would come up on Friday to have everything ready for the weekend. Whatever snow came in during the course of the week would have to be taken care of before the skiers arrived. The kids from Sierraville would shovel the deck of the lodge, and dig out the rope tows. Often the rope area was packed by using their skis, side stepping up the mountain. Sometimes the slopes also need to be packed. Rick related some stories about his time there and the equipment that was used at that point of time. “As we got older and developed a few skills, (better skiing), we could do more for Vic, like actually running rope tows and being his “ski patrol”. By today’s standards, having kids as Ski Patrol is a joke. We did not have much first aid experience. But, we could help people when their bindings broke, got caught in the rope tow, or needed to be taken off the hill on a toboggan.” When asked if Rick knew how to ski before going to YSL, he responded, “We learned to ski at Yuba when there was a break in the work. I remember that we had bad equipment back in those days, cable bindings, wooden skis and bamboo poles. It was a big improvement to get a wooden ski with a metal edge on it. And, we had leather boots; they were as cold as could be. Good gloves were difficult to come by and the rope tow would eat them up. The rope would probably be replaced about every third year. When it was new it would just tear your gloves to shreds. We didn’t have money to buy real ski gloves. A lot of times we would use leather gloves with a wool liner on the inside. We would take those leather gloves and grease them up to make them last a little longer, and to be more water resistant. A few people were able to get rope grips which were aluminum devices used to clamp on to the rope.”

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The Bunny Tow also served as a means of bringing arriving skiers to the lodge. Parking was off the highway, where you would put on your skis to ski to



Bunny Hill rope tow and skiers

the base of the tow. Then you would grasp the rope tow to hitch a ride up the slope. Rick described the rope tows thus: "The beginner rope tow was on your left as you approached the lodge with the top terminal just upslope of the lodge. The primary lift was upslope of the lodge and a little to the right. The top of that rope was high on the ridge, but not to the crest. The beginner lift was a top drive and was powered by a small gas engine, maybe a six cylinder. The main lift was a bottom drive. I think it had a flathead V-8, maybe a Ford. There was a lever attached to a clutch of both so you could put it in and out of gear. I think both drive systems ran through a transmission to control the speed of the rope. As the rope came into the motor room, it would go through a series of pulleys and then around the drive pulley then back onto the snow. The rope would drag on the snow to the top (or bottom in the case of the bigger tow) terminal. The rope terminal of the main lift was just a pulley, with springs as a tensioning device, and a safety gate. The gate was perhaps 40 feet before you would get to the top pulley... sometimes people would get their gloves froze to the rope and get drug up the hill to the safety gate. If the safety gate was tripped, it pulled a string that ran all the way back to the motor room where the

string pulled a nail out of a switch that killed electric power to the engine, which in turn killed the engine." "As lift operators, the main thing you did was organize the lines at the bottom and watch all the way to the top. If somebody were caught, you would shut down the lift by pulling a second line that also pulled a nail switch. The rope would return to the motor room by being carried on "pulleys" that hung above the skiers that were going uphill. The pulleys were wheel shafts hanging from trees with wheel rims serving as pulley wheels. Several, if not all, were parts from Model A Fords. Infrequently the rope would jump off the pulleys and snap to the snow. Getting the rope back on the pulley was a real exercise that started by hand carrying a ladder from the motor room. Keeping the engines fueled was also a challenge. Skiers were not always calm and friendly when the lift shut down and the operator ran to the motor room to re-fuel from jeep cans."

The lodge had a large "sun deck" that was very popular on sunny days, but in order to be of use, often large amounts of snow had to be shoveled by hand to clear it. The roof was a huge nearly flat roof that sloped downhill; the deck was on the uphill side with a much shorter roof that off-loaded the snow onto the deck. There was a flight of stairs you would walk up to get to the lodge entrance. Some winters, very few of those steps were visible; the snow pack covered the rest. The deck level had a fireplace, seating, a small kitchen with a snack bar, and handled the ticket sales and equipment rentals. The lower level had an area



Yuba Ski Land Lodge during a heavy snow

for ski equipment and sleeping accommodations for the boys. The upper level had a loft where the girls slept. My personal experience (Virginia Lutes) started at age 14 when I got a call from Chuck Hardesty

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telling me that the York's would like someone to work in the lodge. He heard that I had been working summers at Campbell Hot Springs, and would I be interested? Therefore, I joined the Sierraville kids working at Yuba. At that time, besides my brother Rick Maddalena and the Scholberg's, others included Dan Hardesty, Jerry Strang, and Tom Buck. All of us began our day by helping Vic and Audrey pack in whatever was needed from the parking area, shoveling snow and packing wood. Then I would go inside to work in the kitchen. I remember always making large sheet cakes for the evening meal, then starting lunch preparations, at times soup, grilled cheese or hot dogs. I loved working with Audrey. As the college students were ready, I helped fit them to skis and boots, sold lift tickets and snack bar items, watched the tow and stoked the fireplace. Those of us who worked there also enjoyed skiing when our work was complete. At that time the college kids seemed so much older than most of the locals who came to ski. By the time I left my employment there at age 19, they no longer looked old at all. One heavy snowstorm hit while we were working. We could not see the top of the ski hill from the lodge and it was miserable. By the time we locals were ready to head to the vehicles in the parking lot we were close to being snowed in. Vic and Audrey thought we should stay the night, and that the parents would figure out what we were doing. So, we readied ourselves, staked out our sleeping spots and ate dinner. Then out of the raging snow came Chuck Hardesty and Carl Scholberg. They arrived on snowshoes to get us. I remember being a bit disappointed.

Spring skiing at the Yuba was always a special time. Many would wear shorts and short sleeve shirts, and yes, there were snow burns and scrapes. The deck of the lodge became a social center; it was the place to be for lunch.

Vic York wrote in a 1982 letter "Over all of the years that we operated the little ski area we enjoyed tremendous support from the local people. Bob Holstrom, Chuck Hardesty, Curley Wright, and Virginia Maddalena deserve particular credit. Bob Holstrom made it possible for us to purchase enough materials by delivering lumber at "gift" prices. Chuck Hardesty spent much of his free time helping us clear brush, down trees, develop a water system, and install the rope tows. He seemed to always know when we were in trouble and needed help. Curly Wright was always available to pump gasoline, repair our vehicles



An artifact from Yuba Ski Land

or bring his snow mobile up to the pass to pull gear into the lodge when our old WW II weasel would give up on us."

During the time Vic and Audrey operated the Ski Land, they also raised two children, Spencer and Terry. Both participated on ski teams in other areas, so were seldom at the Yuba.

The York's left Yuba Ski Land in the early 1970's. Norman and Connie Chapman took over the operation. Vic commented: "We were very disappointed that the Chapman's were unable to keep the ski hill operating. They did have compelling problems, with fuel shortages and huge increases in fuel costs, all followed by three drought years. Yuba Ski Land was never a big money maker for us but we sincerely enjoyed providing a fun area in the snow for the local people, the Bay Area youth groups and the SF State University Classes. We believed we had a very unique situation where everyone shared in the work, responsibility, fun and social exchange. The small, crowded, minimum facility seemed to bring out the best in people's personalities."

Yuba Ski Land ceased operation in 1977. Vic York has since passed away, but his wife Audrey and daughter Terry are still in the Bay Area.

This article was prepared using the following sources:

Correspondence from Vic York

Dick Alvarez, SCHS life member;
Olivia McCaffrey, Sierraville; Mike Buck,
Loyalton; and Rick Maddalena, Sierraville.

In this Sierran we pick up Joshua D. Breyfogle, Sr.'s Overland Trip to California During the Gold Rush in 1849. The group has reached California and are heading for the mine fields.

Diary Of Joshua D. Breyfogle, Sr.

Covering experiences during his overland trip to California during the gold rush in 1849.

- Contributed by Skip Breyfogle

Sacramento City, California, Wednesday, 9th
January, 1850

This is truly an awful night, now ten o'clock. Yesterday we had quite a rainy day and a very heavy rain all last night. This morning the river commenced rising and at this time the whole city is under water. My house on one of the highest parts of the city is now flooded, about one foot of water on the floor and the water still rising very fast. It is now raining and likely to rain all night. We can hear boats in every direction and around us carrying people from and to their houses. The lower part of the City must be in a deplorable state as the river, as we learn, has broken over the banks and inundated the whole lower part of the city. The particulars we cannot learn till morning.



Families had to leave their houses in boats and go out on the high land.

Thursday, 10th: This morning we have about five feet of water in our house. We hailed a boat and moved across the street in the upper story of a wooden house, some fifteen of us. The whole country as far as the eye can reach is under water, nothing but a wild sea all around. Hundreds of families have had to leave their houses in boats and go out on the high land. This now

the 26th, and we are still in the house we took in the first place. It has rained nearly every day since the 10th. The water is now falling very fast. Yesterday I assisted in burying Samuel Robinson, of Union County, son of Asa Robinson, who had another man die on Mary's River, and another went back from St. Joseph. They were members of Dr. Mann's company.

February 7th: Well here we are again afloat bound for the mines, Israel Breyfogle, Mr. Said and myself, and we are now sailing over ten foot water over the very ground that I traveled over in October in ox teams nearly perishing for water, and now as far as the eye can extend, east, west, north and south, a ten foot sea of water.

8th: Today passed Mr. Sutters and stopped a few minutes. He was not at home but was at San Francisco to meet his wife and children whom he sent for from Europe. He was expected tomorrow and they are going to give a royal reception by firing salutes, and this afternoon arrived at Yuba City on the banks of the Feather River near the junction of the Yuba. Crossed over to Yuba and Marysville another city on the Yuba all built within a few weeks.

10th: Arrived at Ourley's Basin, the gold diggings on the Yuba.

12th: The boys are out hunting a location and we expect to get to work in a day or so. It is 18 miles from Marysville to the first diggings. The river is at present a very rapid stream, although much reduced in the course of the summer. It is now lined with tents for some 9 miles, as far as I have been, and there is some fifty or a hundred passing every day for the Upper Diggings. Israel Breyfogle went to work on a mill on the 17th of this month (February) at about 100 dollars a week. I have done nothing as yet. Intend going to work in the morning with Mr. McQueen on a claim that I located. He furnishes the machine and I the location. Provisions are very dear at present, but will be cheaper in a few weeks. I am boarding with Mr. McQueen.

Thursday, 28th: Left this morning for the mountains, crossed the river at this place and had to climb a very high mountain about three miles long and very steep. Arrived at Dutton and Armstrong's tent 8 miles from Foster's Barr through the snow from 2 to 3 feet deep. Intend staying here for the night when I shall push on for the Forks of the river.

- To be concluded in the next Sierran.

Oral History Update

by Virginia Lutes

During the year 2012 our Oral History program really took off.

This interesting program closed out the year with a total of sixteen interviews being conducted. Not all yet have been transcribed, but they have been recorded.

Carroll Hayes visited the Kentucky and gave a terrific interview of his and the Hayes family history. Docents Glenn Deibler and Irmke Schoebel were present and assisted with the interview. This fascinating history took us to 1904 when the Hayes family acquired the Sierra Buttes Mine, through Carroll's time as our Building Inspector, to the present here in Sierra County. Carroll brought a photo book to share of historic pictures.

Elda Ball and I spent a day in Loyalton conducting interviews with three lifelong residents, all were special. Elia Roberti Miles and Adella Dotta Lombardi both were born in the Sierra Valley, grew up on ranches, and now in their 90's, they live at their homes in Loyalton. Each interview opened our eyes to the joys and struggles of ranch life, and life in Loyalton. Both ladies worked very hard during their lives, and continue to be active community members.

Lynn White of White's Service station completed our day, what a sense of humor! Lynn shared stories of pranks, of photography and of family.

Again Elda set up more interviews in Sierra Valley, we were on a roll.

Arlene Amodei, retired teacher, told of how she came to Sierraville, her teaching days and of the Amodei family. She showed some of the wonderful quilts she has completed and had us tour her home and garden. What a great way to start a day. We then motored to mid-Sierra Valley and the Filippini Ranch. Clare Filippini welcomed us, shared photos and had written information ready for our interview. Clare's mother's family, the Campbell's, were the first to bring sheep to Sierra Valley, and they used to summer their sheep near Gold Lake. Clare went on to be a registered nurse, married George Filippini and they raised their sons on the family ranch. We departed for our third interview of the day with Elsie Alexander, retired Loyalton Postmaster, and spouse of Kenneth Alexander, who served the county many years as Deputy, Sheriff, Investigator, etc. Elsie and Ken have many children still in the area.

Elda next lined up interviews in her Loyalton home. Barbara Shelton Massey arrived with her daughter, Karen, and son-in-law, Bruce Ball, Elda's son. Elda not only helped interview, but also participated with memories of Loyalton. These four were not only informative, but an entertaining group to interview. We learned of the old Loyalton Show House, the hospital building that was near Elda's home, what kids did for fun growing up in Loyalton, and about a movie filmed in Loyalton, "Beyond the Forest".

Dana Chandler Marin was next. Dana's Loyalton roots grow deep. She is daughter of Laura Chandler; granddaughter of Scribner's; related to Fagg's (who operated toll road between Sierraville and Truckee); Grandmother Jennie Church Huntley; and Peterson. She is spouse of long time fire chief, Joe Marin. Dana arrived with photographs. Her Grandfather Scribner acquired the Thompson photos, and continued to take pictures in the area. We barely touched on all the history that Dana has to share.

Suzi Schoensee arranged an interview with Ruth Egbert of Sattley. Ruth was born in 1914. She was quite a character. She died recently. Although she could no longer hear well, she told of her history, attending the Pioneer School in Quincy, life as a cowgirl and housewife and raising children. Her roots go back to La Porte.

Our final interview for the year was with Earle Little, who purchased the Loyalton Hardware. His family still has the business. Elda conducted this interview on her own and captured Earle Loyalton history.

The transcribing of all of the recordings will continue. In the future we will share snippets of the amazing history revealed in "The Sierran". We have a committee ready to take your interview. Please consider contacting me by email to set up your interview at museum@sierracountyhistory.org. Thanks to all who have taken the time to participate. - Virginia



Membership Corner News

by Membership Chairperson, Suzi Schoensee

We reported last July on five of the 30 members whose families were present beginning in the 1850s and had moved on to other places and no longer lived here. This time I will tell you about several more families in the same category. **Melvin and Marcella Ponta's family** were pioneer gold seekers, farmers and business owners in the villages of Goodyears Bar, Downieville, Loganville, Sierra City, Poker Flat and Eureka City between the years of 1850 and 1875. **Jeff and Donna Ponta's family** were pioneer gold seekers, farmers, ranchers and business owners from 1850 to 1875. Jeff is the great-grandson of Emil Loeffler who owned and worked the Kentucky Mine during the 1940s and 50s. Members of his family resided and worked in Poker Flat, Downieville, Loganville and Sierra City. **Margaret Riffel's family** resided in Rocky Point, Sattley, Downieville and Loyalton between 1850 and 1925. They were pioneer farmers. Margaret

is related to the Yarringtons, the McKenzies and the McNairs of Mohawk Valley in Plumas County, and the Vans and Hathaways. Her ancestor Henrietta Lockart-Yarrington was the postmistress at Rocky Point, near Calpine on Highway 89, in 1874. **Mary Schatz** had family by the names of Campbell, Hanson and Man in the community of Sierraville between the years of 1850 and 1900. They were gold seekers and farmers. **Robert Schoensee** claims his early history, 1850 to 1942, to his wife, **Jean Turner-Hale-Campbell**, whose roots were from Meadow Lake, Charcoal Flat (Fournier Ranch), Morristown, Sattley, Beckwourth and Kettle, a thriving community located adjacent to Marble Hot Springs with a post office and telephones. The family were pioneer gold seekers, school teachers, ranchers, business owners and community leaders. They were instrumental in establishing telegraph and telephone services to Sierra Valley.