

Schussing through the years

(Cont'd from P. 29)

The present day instructor's course is utilized by instructors from throughout the Midwest region, Almon said.

In the early 1950s a flourish of activity came as the Gaylord area, still long before the Swiss Village theme was thought up, began to move ahead with plans that would earn the area the title of the Ski Capitol of Michigan.

While Almon and others at Boyne Mountain were establishing the ski instructors program, the Otsego Ski Club and Sylvan Knob continued to flourish.

As skiing became more and more popular in the area, a ski team was started at Gaylord High School in 1952 or '53, according to Bill Granlund, retired teacher and principal at the school.

Students there would practice by skiing down a small incline into the valley behind the school football field, Granlund said.

Lynn and Ruth Meade, owners of Sylvan Knob, were the first coaches of the team and their son, Lynn, was one of the school's first star skiers, Granlund recalled.

Now Willie Meade, a grandson of the Meades, is one of the best skiers on the present day Gaylord High School Ski Team.

Also in the early 1950's, Almon developed the Mt. Frederic Ski area, between Frederic and Waters, and business boomed.

In 1954, a Detroit investor began developing the AuSable Ski Ranch. That project moved full steam ahead when the late Jerry Fairbanks purchased the proper-

ty in 1956 and began to develop and promote the area in earnest.

As skiing continued to become more and more popular, Carl Rolinski donated a parcel of land near the St. Mary Cemetery to be used as a ski area for local youth.

Roundtops, as the area became known, started operation in 1957, according to Bob Schlang, who used to work the single tow rope at the ski center.

"That was a great place to take the kids. They could ski there all day for 50 cents," longtime Gaylord resident Jean Tomaski said of Roundtops.

Almon decided in 1957 to concentrate solely on his Mt. Frederic area, and Ski Village closed.

About this time, Al Gornick took over the reigns at the Otsego Ski Club. In later years, ownership of the club would pass to Gornick's son, Keith.

Steady business at the AuSable ski area, at Sylvan Knob and the Otsego Ski Club prompted developers to start up a new ski area in the mid-1960's on Sawyer Road, near Lake Nineteen, called the Pinnacles.

Problems started in some ski areas, however.

The winter of 1964 marked the last season for Roundtops.

A fire a few days before Christmas, caused by youngsters who broke into the bar, burned Mt. Frederic to the ground. Almon called it quits and was offered work at Boyne Mountain.

He and his wife, Stephanie, who retain their residence on

Heart Lake, work weekends in the ski shop at Boyne Mountain to this day.

"I didn't want to start over again, but wanted to be able to stay close to the skiers," Almon said.

Snow Valley closed in 1968, after 20 successful years of operation.

The Snow Valley area was later purchased and is now Beaver Creek Resort.

A fire in the mid 1970s also suspended operation at the AuSable Ranch.

A few years later, the land would be sold and the area was renamed Michaywe'.

Michaywe reopened the ski area in the late 1970s.

About the time the new name went up at Michaywe', the Pinnacles underwent a name change and became Tyrolean Hills.

Tyrolean Hills has undergone various financial troubles in recent years and ceased operation after the 1988 ski season.

In 1983, wealthy businessman Harry Melling purchased Sylvan Knob from the Meades and changed the name of the ski center to Sylvan Resort.

Skiing is still big business in the Gaylord area.

Downhill skiing is available at the Otsego Ski Club, Sylvan Resort and Michaywe' today.

"We've been having a tremendous year. The early and heavy snow has been perfect for skiers," Ron Chavey, head of the Otsego Ski Club Ski Patrol said.

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