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## Mt. Belmont Memories

From left, Shirley Reinig, Glo Perry and Pat Downs relax between runs at the Belmont Ski Hill in the 1950s.

By PEGGY O'NEILL  
 IR Outdoors Editor

Curt Synness can't tell you what the current snow conditions are like at Great Divide ski area. In fact, he probably couldn't care less. But he can rattle off the names of the original "Ski Mountaineers" who cut Highballer — the first downhill run on Belmont Ski Hill — and the year that runs called The Face and Rattlesnake were built — 1949.

As a sports historian Synness, a non-skier, collects factoids like these and shares them with the rest of us so we can all nod our heads and say, "So that's the way it happened."

Synness will serve as moderator tonight at a panel discussion on the history of Belmont Ski Hill, known among those born after the invention of the snowboard as The Great Divide and

### If you go...

**What:** Panel discussion on the history of the Belmont Ski Hill  
**Where:** Montana Historical Society, 225 N. Roberts  
**When:** Tonight at 6:30 p.m.

among those born after the invention of the snowboard as The Great Divide and

among snow snobs as "The Rock." Serving on the panel will be Helena's only U.S. Olympic Ski Team member, a Helena-area World War II ski trooper and other veterans of the Belmont Ski Hill — a group guaranteed to be more interesting than tonight's Olympic TV schedule, which includes women's curling, men's free skate and biathlon.

Rogers Little, Pat Downs and Harry Reinig will all share their memories of the ski hill founded in 1941. Little, who learned to ski at Belmont at age 4 and whose father, Amos "Bud" Little, was manager of the U.S. Olympic Alpine Team in 1960, missed out on participating in the 1972 Sapporo Olympics when an injury forced him to miss the Games.

Downs, who along with her late husband Bill, was a historian of the hill, will bring a very large scrapbook with photos from the hill dating from the late '40s to the early '60s.

Reinig, who served with the 10th Mountain Division during World War II, began skiing at Belmont around 1946 in leather toe straps and long skis. Now in his 80s, he still averages about 30 days a year on the slopes and chooses between his Volant Power Carves, his Volk T13s and his Atomic R:8s. He's raised a family of five skiers and now occasionally gets to ski for free



Top, this photo, taken next to the original Belmont rope tow, circa 1949, is labeled simply 'Tow Commission.' From left to right are Les Alke, Hal Erickson, Ken Kinney, Roy Riley and Les Rudio. Alke, Kinney, Riley and Rudio were four of the six co-founders of the Belmont Ski Hill in 1941.

Above, Rogers Little (center, with hamburger) is shown after winning one of his first races at Belmont when he was about 9 years old. Rogers went on to ski downhill for the U.S. Ski Team from 1967-72, qualifying for the 1972 Olympics.

because of his age and his 10th Mountain Division veteran status. He's seen the area grow from a couple of runs served by a tow-rope to where it is now — five chairlifts and 139 trails.

"It's hard to compare the snow conditions between now and 60 years ago," Reinig said. "There's



Harry Reinig negotiates a run at Belmont in the early 1950s. Reinig, now in his 80s, still skis the Great Divide regularly.

more traffic on it now. We had some really good years and had some bad years."

Synness' personal history at Belmont ended in 1966 when he took a header on Highballer and turned his passion to indoor sports like wrestling, playing in eight- and nine-ball pool (he tied for 33rd place

in the VNEA National Open nine-ball singles tournament in Las Vegas) and watching the Pittsburgh Steelers on TV. But he's collected a digest of memories from such Belmont notables as Anna Rudio, an original member of the Belmont Ski

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## IR outdoors outlook



Montana Discovery Foundation Snowschool Event, Feb. 25, see below

### Saturday-Sunday

Feb. 18-19  
 Helena Outdoor Club trip to Firebrand Pass and Autumn Creek in Glacier National Park. Trip starts at Marias Pass and is an intermediate trip, but well-conditioned advanced beginners will have fun.  
 Details: Call Tim and Jan Horan by the first weekend in February for reservations and details, 442-1619 (H) or 444-1613 (W).

### Monday

Feb. 20  
 The Montana Discovery Foundation's snowshoe hike at Blacktail Gulch, east of Townsend on Hwy. 12  
 When: 10 a.m. to noon  
 Cost: \$4/person, or \$10/family  
 Registration: Required by Feb. 15 with the Old Baldy Community Education Program in Townsend. To receive a copy of the registration form, contact Sam at 495-3718 or visit <http://townsendps.schoolwires.com>.  
 Details: Montana Discovery Foundation 495-3718 or 495-3711

### Tuesday

Feb. 21  
 LCAS presents "Freshwater Sponges of Western Montana" with Dr. John Addis, Professor of Biology at Carroll College  
 When: 7 p.m.  
 Where: the Lewis and Clark Library's large meeting room.

### Thursday

Feb. 23  
 Women in the Outdoors planning meeting  
 When: 6:30 p.m.  
 Where: Red Lion Colonial Hotel  
 Details: Tammy at 442-5454 or e-mail at [mtsnoorder@earthlink.net](mailto:mtsnoorder@earthlink.net)

### Saturday

Feb. 25  
 Montana Discovery Foundation Snowschool Event — introductory snowshoe walks will last about 45 minutes and will leave the trailhead every half hour.  
 When: 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.  
 Where: Tenmile Environmental Trail, about 12 miles west of Helena.  
 Reservations: 495-3718 or 495-3711

### Tuesday

Feb. 28  
 Helena Bicycle Club presentation on bicycle fit and positioning  
 When: 7 p.m.  
 Where: Great Divide Cyclery, 336 N. Jackson  
 Details: Helena Bicycle Club president Karen Thompson at 443-3166

### Friday

March 3  
 Helena Ducks Unlimited Banquet  
 When: Doors open at 5:30 p.m.; dinner begins at 7 p.m.  
 Where: Helena Civic Center  
 Cost: \$50 for singles; \$65 for couples. Call Kathy Stiner at 458-6411 to purchase them.

### Saturday-Sunday

March 18-19  
 Helena Outdoor Club trip to Cummings Cabin near Lincoln — 1.5-mile ski into the cabin, which will require carrying an overnight pack with sleeping bag, food and warm clothes. The cabin sleeps six people, so it's a first come, first serve basis. Small fee for cabin rental.  
 Details: Barb, 443-1159

Send events to [peggy.oneill@helenair.com](mailto:peggy.oneill@helenair.com)

## Cold air shuts down Great Divide ski area today

By EVE BYRON  
 IR Staff Writer

Great Divide Ski Area is closed today due to forecasts that call for single-digit temperatures and wind chills of 20 to 30 degrees below zero — even though it

received about 8 inches of new snow early Wednesday.

"We just don't want to expose people to extremely dangerous conditions," ski area owner Kevin Taylor said on Wednesday.

The National Weather Service predicts that an

Arctic blast of cold air will come down from Canada early today, powered by wind speeds of 15 to 25 mph. Snow accumulations of 1 to 3 inches are possible at lower elevations, with up to 6 to 12 inches in the mountains.

With these types of conditions, frostbite can occur in less than 30 minutes.

Taylor said that the thought of people sitting on a chairlift in these conditions is worrisome, especially since the hydraulics and electronics used to power

the chairs don't often work well in the bitter cold either.

"So we thought maybe tomorrow is a good day to let things settle down a bit and pass through," Taylor said.

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