



HEAD: What's in a name? Plenty, on Snowmass

By Catherine Lutz

Before Snowmass opened for business 35 years ago, part of the satisfaction that local trail-building crews and ski company employees got for their often strenuous labor — aside from skiing the prospective runs to make sure they were adequate for future resort guests — was naming the trails. Some were named for terrain features, others for early ski area workers, and still more for some odd happening that took place in that particular spot, but each in some way was a lasting tribute to those hard-working crews. The naming tradition carried on as the mountain was expanded and more runs developed. Ever wonder what the story is behind Naked Lady or Whispering Jesse? Well, look no further.

Of the names given to the five distinct areas of the mountain, most evoke the feel of the pre-development era. Elk Camp, for example, is named for the large ungulates' historic calving range — these graceful creatures to this day pass through the area during the winter months. Alpine Springs was christened such for the many springs found where that lift now unloads. Perhaps the most well-known section of Snowmass is the Big Burn, with its wide-open cruisers and sparse trees. A huge fire is said to have swept through this area in the late 1880s, rumored to have been started by the native Ute Indians attempting to discourage white settlement. Others say it was the other way around, the settlers trying to drive out the Indians. Still others say it was simply a lightning initiated fire (but that's not as interesting a story).

Other parts of the mountain take their names from a more recent era. Sam's Knob, on the ski area's west side, was named for local rancher Sam Stapleton. Campground was quite simply labeled after the Forest Service campground at the base of this area.

For those who don't know the area, some of the runs carry a no-explanation-necessary connotation that can help you decide whether to try them or not. So while Sunnyside, Sheer Bliss and Sandy Park evoke feelings of pleasant, carefree schussing, the more adventurous might hone their skills on the Hanging Valley Wall, The Edge, Free Fall, or Showcase (a wide-cut, well-groomed slope directly under the High Alpine Lift where people, well, showcase). One can find Powerline, a gladed area off the Burn, by looking for the towers and power lines rising above the trees there. And Slot, a black diamond run, accurately describes the natural rock slide clearing down the face of Sam's Knob.

But they might think twice at the top of runs like Possible, a steep narrow expert chute in the High Alpine area that drops between rocks and probably elicits thoughts of, 'Hmm, I wonder if this is possible.' Or Bottoms Up, poetically termed for what happens to many skiers when they venture onto this side hill. The double-black-diamond run AMF, on the cliff-studded side of the Cirque elicits much speculation on the meaning of those initials — Adios My Friend is the respectable version, which gives you an idea of what's in store for you there.

Many of Snowmass' runs simply have good stories behind them. Naked Lady, the run and now-defunct lift on the middle part of the mountain, got its name when a lonely trail cutter pinned a Playboy centerfold to a tree in the area. Wineskin was christened for where the wine bottles were stashed during the old snowcat touring days before the lifts opened. Nearby Dallas Freeway was also labeled during the snowcat era, for the only place on the Big Burn a Dallas ski club wanted to ski.

Explaining the origin of runs like Coffee Pot and Camp 3 can simply show off your knowledge of Snowmass history — the former was named after an old camp in the area that had coffee pot hanging in a tree; the latter for the trail crew which clear the area for the Sheer Bliss lift.

Don't feel offended if you frequently find yourself on Turkey Trot — it's not meant to describe the snow sliders here but rather the many turkeys spotted in this area. Same with Lunkerville; this run was originally intended for ponds which could be stocked with lunkers, a type of fish.

On every part of the mountain, trails are named for the brave men (and they were mostly men) who shaped the ski area into what we know it today. Hal's Hollow, a wide open slope through the trees next to Velvet Falls, is named for Hal Hartman, a ski patroller and early tour guide who still lives in Snowmass. Sneaky's, a Big Burn run, pays homage to Jim "Sneaky" Snobble, whose crew surveyed the area to determine where the runs would go and then cut many of them by hand. Art's Ulcer, which doesn't appear on the trail map, very accurately describes what Art Kuen and Art Bowles must have went through as they worked on clearing the area under the Alpine Springs lift. In honor of Snowmass lift manager Jesse Caparella, employees facetiously titled a run Whispering Jesse, because he was never known to whisper. And Garret Gulch, as well as Garret Peak behind the ski area, was dubbed for a local powder guide who ran an infamous rooming house in Aspen.

Many runs are now memorials. Roberto's, in the hike-to terrain off of High Alpine, was named after a former ski school director killed here. Reidar's, also in the High Alpine area, is in memory of Snowmass ski

patroller Reidar Lundh. Mick's Gully, on the burn, was named in honor of Mick Strong, one of the original snowcat guides killed in a car crash in the 60s.

Finally, some trail names are just colorful. Zugspitze, on Sam's Knob, was christened after Germany's highest mountain, when nearby Garmisch-Partenkirchen and Aspen became sister cities in the 1960's. Banzai, which could describe the attitude which some skiers take to this swift open ridge, is actually a distortion of the word for a Japanese tree that looks very much like a gnarled old tree on this run. And how could we forget Fanny Hill dubbed so because of all the fannies meeting snow on this beginner run.

Do you know any interesting tidbits behind Snowmass' runs? Or have you come to know a certain area by a name not on the official trail map? Of course, we can't promise it'll make it onto the ski company's literature, but call us with your creative suggestions: 923-5829, ext. 101. (The information for this article came mainly from Warren Ohlrich's book, "Aspen/Snowmass Downhill Ski Trails.")