

Gould Academy's Ski Area at Swan's Corner "The First Sunday River Ski Area"

In early-mid 1940's, Gould Academy acquired land that was part of the Locke-Swan farm from the Swan family (probably Bion Swan?). Ruel Swain who graduated from Gould in 1944 said that lots of wheel barrow and shovel work was needed to turn the slope into a ski jump, landing and giant slalom course for high school competition. Incidentally, the terrain where it was located is still known locally as "the Alps". The "First Sunday River Ski Area" continued in use until the "Second" Sunday River ski area on the side of Barker Mountain was opened to Gould ski teams for practice and competition. Gould ski team members skied at the Sunday River/Swan's Corner ski area for at least 15 years and maybe longer. As late as the 1980's recreational skiers used the jump slope and landing.



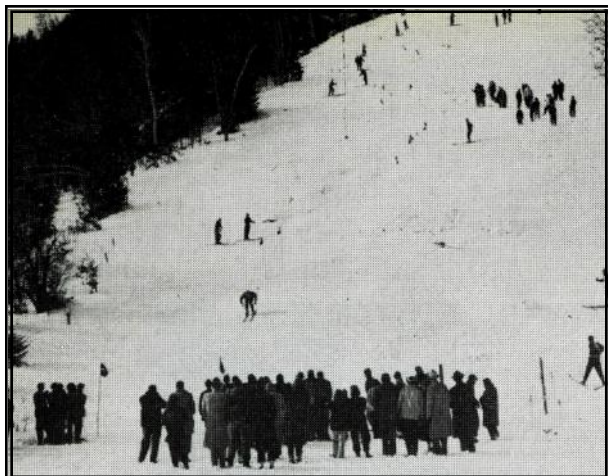
Four Gould Academy graduates have contributed to this article: Ruel Swain, 1944

Below: Photo map based on Google Earth image— Gould Academy's ski area was divided into three facilities: jumping, downhill/slalom and a warming building



and a member of the academy ski team; Donald Brooks, 1946; Lee Carver, 1949 and Roger Adams (1952) also a Gould ski team member from 1950-1952. I have added things that I remember about this area from the my perspective as a childhood summer vacationer in Sunday River and also as a Gould student and ski meet spectator.

As a ski area, it had advantages over the academy's earlier ski trails



and jumps—the most important factors were length and angle of the slope’s fall-line. It was easily reached by cars and buses, had good spectator parking along the road and only three miles from the academy campus. But, skiers or other volunteers had to “groom” the trails by side-step packing them plus the take-off and landing of the jump. At first, there was no tow or lift. Skiers had to hike to the starting point. But as Roger Adams pointed out, later a rope tow lift gave new life to jumping.

One source credits Wilbur Myers with organizing the first team skiing at Gould Academy in 1939. However, the ski coach most contributors remember was Howard Chivers. Chivers left Gould for a while for military service but returned to coach through the middle and later 1940’s.



Before the Swan ski property was available, Gould had established a ski area for downhill/slalom/giant slalom and jumping at the “Anderson hill” located on the side of Robertson Hill just behind what is now (2011) the property of Bethel Auto Sales on Route 2 not far from the Swain Farm. Gould’s cross country ski trails started behind the girls’ dormitory (Marion True

Gehring House) and followed a course up into Grover Hill. Cross country skiing for the academy still uses basically the same course today.

In talking about his experience on the Gould ski team, Ruel Swain said that the Anderson ski jump was about a sixty foot length jump whereas the Swan’s Corner ski

jump was probably 80 to 100 feet.

Lee Carver writes, “It seems to me that it must have been later than ‘45 because I only remember skiing there one or two seasons and my last season there would have been spring of '49. I was not on the Gould ski team but did some packing of the runs (a bunch of people side-stepping up the hill to “groom” the run, so to speak), and monitoring flags during slalom meets. I watched the jumping, but never jumped there. Usually the Gould bus would take a bunch out there, or we'd line up someone with a car. It was a great hill for getting in shape because you had to climb up in order to



Downhill/slalom course at Swan's Corner—note skiers on the right working their way back up the hill.

come down. It was great for you leg muscles once you got into it. I thought it was a better fall-line than Mt Vernon, but it lacked a tow. Mt Vernon was a lot of fun but had less pitch. “

Roger Adams who was on the ski team in the 1950-1952 periods tells this story about the jump's ski tow:

“The Gould Academy ski jump, to my knowledge and recollection was the only ski jump to have its own rope tow. The rope tow was built around 1950 when I was a member of the Gould jumping team. It paralleled the jump's landing hill which made the lift line extremely steep. It was powered by a brand new Ford V-8 engine. When the engine ran at a



Above—About 1980—Bill Koch Youth ski jumping at Swan's Corner. By this time Gould skiers trained and skied at Sunday River Ski Area.

slow speed it was very difficult to hang onto the rope as it would pull on your arms severely. The alternative was to run it at a fast speed or about 25 to 30 mph. At that speed you would get a nice fast ride up the hill! Frequently, when you reached the top you release the rope and become airborne! One of the problems with the high speed was getting on because the rope was zipping so fast it would burn your mittens. It became very necessary to wear leather mitts or gloves and even then they would wear out from the rope zipping through your hands.

The ski jump rope tow was a great concept as we could get in many jumps which would ultimately improve our skills. This also gave us a competitive advantage over other school's jumping teams. During the early fifties Gould's competing jumping teams were Edward Little from Auburn, Maine, Stephens High from Rumford, Berlin High, N.H., Lebanon High, N.H, and Hanover High, Hanover, N.H.

Paul Kailey was the Gould ski coach when I was on the team in 1950-51-52. The jumping team in 51-52 consisted of Les Streeter, Ray Chase, Jerry Emery, Norm Ferguson, Roger Adams, Herb Adams, Gerry Fortin, Melvin Olson and Bucky Burnham. The Gould ski jumping squad benefitted greatly from the use of the Gould ski jump rope tow.”

Lee Carver (Gould grad 1949) also writes about a practice jump on the west side of the Gould athletic field: “They built a jump on the west side of the athletic field, with a small tower -- maybe 6 or 8 feet. I would guess that it was about a 10 meter hill. Don Lord and I were out there jumping one late afternoon, and Coach Chivers was giving us pointers”.

Skiing over the downhill course could be quite tricky. A skier coming down the upper stage of the run would have built up a very good speed. As skier approached the lower area, there was a sharp right turn which led to the last open slope before the finish. If a skier missed the turn, and quite a few did, the skier would suddenly be airborne and faced with landing in the tops of a small grove of fir trees. These events would raise a hoot and a holler from the race watchers lining the trail.

Photos Gould Academy Heralds and staff.

Left—Front row: Gerald Emery, Norman Ferguson, Jr., Paul Kailey. Back row: Shelby Putnam, Addison Saunders and Leslie Streeter

