

# Why Did Olympic National Park's Ski Area Move from Deer Park to Hurricane Ridge?

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Have you ever skied or snowboarded at Hurricane Ridge? I am an avid snowboarder and have snowboarded at Hurricane Ridge since I was very young. The snow sparkling in the sunlight is a beautiful sight to behold! In the summertime my family and I go on hikes and camping trips at both Hurricane Ridge and Deer Park. In the winter, my friends and I snowboard every weekend we can. Almost every winter weekend, there is a fresh layer of powder blanketing the alpine slopes and forests. A day with ice on all the slopes is very rare, which makes the conditions phenomenally good for skiing and snowboarding. From the ski area, there is a broad view of the Olympic Mountains and you can even see all the way to Deer Park. In all of my years snowboarding up at Hurricane Ridge I had never heard of people skiing in a different location in the Olympics. But, when I was talking to my father, he told me that a former ski area was at Deer Park. This made me wonder, "Why did they move the ski area from Deer Park to Hurricane Ridge?" Before I even researched about that, I wanted to learn more about the history of Olympic National Park and its mountain range.

Believe it or not, Deer Park and Hurricane Ridge were once under the ocean. These mountains are part of a bigger mountain range named the Olympic Mountains. Geologists believe that around 35 million years ago, the massive plate carrying the Pacific Ocean's floor crashed with the North American Plate forming the Olympic Mountains ("Olympic National Park"). This collision created very steep and harsh mountains. When the snow comes to the Olympics it makes very smooth, steep slopes creating a wonderful ski area.

The area of Blue Mountain known as Deer Park was named in the late 1800s because of the deer that the hunters found in the meadows ("LostSkiAreas - Deer Park - Olympic National Park"). In 1936, Leo White, a local industrialist, borrowed a motorcycle engine and installed a

rope tow for skiers to travel uphill (Oakes 51). This lift went twenty miles per hour and cost seventy five cents to ride (Oakes 60). By 1941 the thriving Deer Park Ski Area included practice slopes, a downhill run, a class B jump, several short courses, and a 1000 foot rope tow that towed skiers up 300 feet in elevation (Radke and Ducceschi 2). Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) barracks were remodeled to become a lodge in 1937 (Oakes 25). The lodge was extensively remodeled after World War II (Oakes 34). It had a kitchen and a main room with a fireplace, and at night people could sleep in some designated rooms (Evans).

On June 29, 1938 Olympic National Park was established ("Olympic National Park Timeline - Olympic National Park (U.S. National Park Service)"). Olympic National Park's history is very important to Clallam County residents because of its financial impacts and how it has preserved part of the wilderness here. In 1940 Blue Mountain, where Deer Park Ski Area was located, was brought into the new Park's boundaries. Prior to that, it was a part of the Olympic National Forest. (Radke and Ducceschi 1).

So, why did the National Park Service decide to move the ski area away from Deer Park? One reason is that Deer Park had remarkably light snowfall and the slopes were exposed to the sun, restricting the length of the skiing season (Webster). Low snowfall and sun exposed slopes make horrible skiing conditions. Also, the road to Deer Park was only a one way road in the winter and it would be very expensive to build a new road (Fowler, et al. 2). Additionally, the parking lot could only fit 50 cars so not many skiers could enjoy the slopes (Fowler, et al. 2). It would also be redundant to build a new road because Deer Park did not offer a tremendous view for tourists (Fowler, et al. 2).

When the officials were thinking of a new ski area they had three different parts of the park in mind. These were Hurricane Ridge, Upper Soleduck Basin, and Seven Lakes Basin. Each potential ski location had its advantages and disadvantages so none of them were perfect.

Hurricane Ridge was not at the top of the list for being the new ski area for a couple of reasons. Hurricane Ridge is a small, windswept ridge that is way up in the Olympic Mountains. There was a road built by the CCC that came up south from the Elwha but was very narrow. For that reason they would have to build a new, expensive road. Also, the proposed ski slopes were short and ran immediately into thick woods. The slopes were steep and harsh and ski patrol would have a hard time getting injured skiers up them. Water was also not available and would have had to be shipped up from Port Angeles (Fowler, et al. 2).

Another place they considered was the Upper Sol Duc Basin. The Upper Sol Duc Basin had lots of steep slopes and rolling terrain giving it a 800 ft drop in half a mile. This area seemed the most ideal and could fit 5,000 skiers easily (Fowler, et al. 3). The slopes would have had shelter from the bowl and had a stunning view of Mount Olympus and the Bailey Range. The area would have been a great summer and winter spot for visitors. Also, water was readily available. Unfortunately, they would have to build a ten mile road to make the area accessible (Fowler, et al. 3).

Deer Park ski instructor Joy Lucas described a trip that her ski organization made to find a more ideal ski area. They went into Sol Duc park and described it like this:

There was still 10 feet of snow - and it was May - WOW! ... Both Sol Duc and Bogachiel were beautiful big basins with long, open, north slopes of every kind... The Sol Duc Hot Springs were at the bottom and a gentle seven mile road was all that was needed to reach the base, where we could see an ideal place for a lodge. Recommendations were made and great hopes were held for the future of skiing in the Olympic Mountains. [But] After the war, the Park Service was not interested in having a

big ski area within its boundaries. The newspaper gave its backing to Hurricane Ridge as it was closer to Port Angeles and would bring more business (Lucas 12).

The third location was the Seven Lakes Basin. Seven Lakes Basin is located right over the ridge from the Upper Sol Duc Basin. The conditions there were very similar to the ones in the Upper Sol Duc Basin. However, several more miles of road would have to be added (Fowler, et al. 3).

Clearly, the Upper Sol Duc Basin probably would have been the best choice for a ski area in terms of quality of skiing. However, when the research was done, in 1946-48, the Region Four Winter Use Committee decided to upgrade Deer Park for the time being (Fowler, et al. 3). In 1957 the new Hurricane Ridge Road was completed with the help of Mission 66 funds. This program promoted building in National Parks prior to the National Park Service's 50th anniversary. A quote from *Preserving Nature in the National Parks* by Richard West Sellers says:

Mission 66 funded completion of Olympic National Park's Hurricane Ridge Road and its attendant facilities, specifically with the intent of increasing public use in order to block persistent attempts by lumbermen to open the heart of the park to timber cutting (Sellers 188).

Hurricane Ridge officially became the new local ski area and former Deer Park lift operators moved their lift operations to Hurricane Ridge (Oakes 95). The ski area at Hurricane Ridge has experienced many changes in where the lifts have been located. In the 1960s the ski area operators, Avon Miller and Ted Simpson, briefly had a rope tow set up on a slope called Sunrise (Oakes 101). In 1971 the ski area set up a Poma lift in the bowl north of the intermediate slope. The intermediate slope has some man made jumps and pipes to do tricks on. Also this slope is groomed with a couple powder sections in the trees.

Here is what a day might look like when you arrive at Hurricane Ridge. When you arrive at the parking lot you buy a ticket in the small, portable brown building. Then you can go across the parking lot and choose which area you want to try first. Most people do the bunny hill first, because it is the easiest, and progress to the Poma, because it is the hardest. The bunny slope is very small and is great for learning how to ski or snowboard. The intermediate tow is very fast and slick so you have to hold to the rope tightly! When you try the intermediate slope there is a easy, hard packed surface with some jumps. When you try the Poma slopes you are faced with powder, groomed sections, and natural and manmade jumps! Amazingly, in the winter, snow drifts range from 12-15 ft (Oakes 46)! There has been many a time that I have been stuck in the deep powder!

For me, I am glad overall that the National Park Service moved the ski area to Hurricane Ridge. It is nice to have a fair amount of snow, and steeper slopes. Deer Park Ski Area had relatively mellow slopes with many ups and downs. But above all, it is nice to have the area so close to Port Angeles because it would be significantly harder to go up and snowboard every weekend if you had to drive about 41 miles to Soleduck ("Distance from Port Angeles to Sol Duc Hot Springs Search").

Both Deer Park and Hurricane Ridge ski areas have been small, but have brought tourists to Port Angeles to enjoy winter sports. Hurricane Ridge is a terrific place to go spend your time both winter and summer. I hope that you have learned something about Deer Park and Hurricane Ridge and would like to try skiing or snowboarding Hurricane Ridge in the winter and visit Deer Park in the summer.

## Annotated Bibliography

### Primary Sources

Fowler, Harold G., et al. *Report of Region Four Winter Use Committee-Winter 1946-47 and Winter 1947-48.*

I learned about the possible options for the ski resorts. It was helpful to learn the pluses and minuses of each possible ski area.

Lucas, Joy. *It Started in the Mountains: A History of Pacific Northwest Ski Instructors. 1st ed.,* Professional Ski Instructors of America, 1996.

I learned about road grades and the experience of a ski instructor from Seattle coming to Deer Park every weekend and exploring to find a new ski area.

Radke, Helen N., and Joan Ducceschi. "Favorite Places." *Olympic Leaders*, 2003.

I learned about experiences of an avid Deer Park Skier, Ester Webster. It was nice to know some stories about skiing at Deer Park.

Webster, Charles. "Spring Snow For Skiing Shown At Soleduck Park." *Port Angeles Evening News*, [Port Angeles], 19 June 1941.

I found out why the Upper Sol Duc Basin had very ideal skiing conditions.

## Secondary Sources

"Alpenglow Ski History - Olympic N.P. - Hart Lake Ski Development File." *The Alpenglow Gallery*, 7 Sept. 2004, [www.alpenglow.org/ski-history/notes/ms/onp-hart-lake-dev.html](http://www.alpenglow.org/ski-history/notes/ms/onp-hart-lake-dev.html). Accessed 5 Mar. 2019.

This article introduced me to some of the reasons why Hurricane Ridge wasn't the ideal place for a ski resort.

"Distance from Port Angeles to Sol Duc Hot Springs Search." Google, [www.google.com/search?q=distance+from+port+angeles+to+sol+duc+hot+springs&oq=distance+from+port+to+sol+duc+hot+springs&aqs=chrome.2.69i57j0l2.28109j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](http://www.google.com/search?q=distance+from+port+angeles+to+sol+duc+hot+springs&oq=distance+from+port+to+sol+duc+hot+springs&aqs=chrome.2.69i57j0l2.28109j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8).

I learned the distance from Port Angeles to Sol Duc.

Evans, Gail H. *Olympic National Park Historic Resources Study*. National Park Service, 1983. [www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online\\_books/olym/hrs/chap4.htm](http://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/olym/hrs/chap4.htm). Accessed 20 Feb. 2019.

This gave me some background for the Deer Park Ski area.

"LostSkiAreas - Deer Park - Olympic National Park." WINDSOX SERVICE - Olympic National Park, [windsox.us/VISITOR/Early\\_ONP\\_Skiers/Deer\\_Park\\_Skiers.html](http://windsox.us/VISITOR/Early_ONP_Skiers/Deer_Park_Skiers.html). Accessed 25 Feb. 2019.

I learned about dates, geography, and numbers of people that skied at Deer Park.



National Park Service. V. Putting the unemployed to Work: Depression Years and Federal Relief Programs. Accessed 21 Feb. 2019.

I learned more about the CCC and who initialized the it.

Oakes, Roger M. *Skiing in Olympic National Park*. Arcadia Publishing, 2014.

I learned about skiing at Deer Park and at Hurricane Ridge. Also the pictures gave me a great idea of Deer Park in the winter.

"Olympic National Park Timeline - Olympic National Park (U.S. National Park Service)."

NPS.gov Homepage (U.S. National Park Service), 1 Feb. 2018,

[www.nps.gov/olym/planyourvisit/olympic-timeline.htm](http://www.nps.gov/olym/planyourvisit/olympic-timeline.htm). Accessed 5 Mar. 2019.

This timeline gave me an idea about Olympic National Park history.

Sellars, Richard W. *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History : with a New Preface and Epilogue*. Yale UP, 2009.

I learned about Mission 66. This was important for the building of Hurricane Ridge Road.