

16 – Blue Hills History – Winter Sports

When we think of winter sports at the Blue Hills most of us *hikers* think snowshoeing. Or *maybe* XC skiing. Some might think of downhill skiing at the slope on Great Blue Hill. Most probably don't think of outdoor skating... or ski jumping... or a toboggan run, but they *were* options at one point. This week we take a look at the history of outdoor winter sports at the Blue Hills.

The origins of large-scale winter sports at the Blue Hills – The St. Moritz Carnival

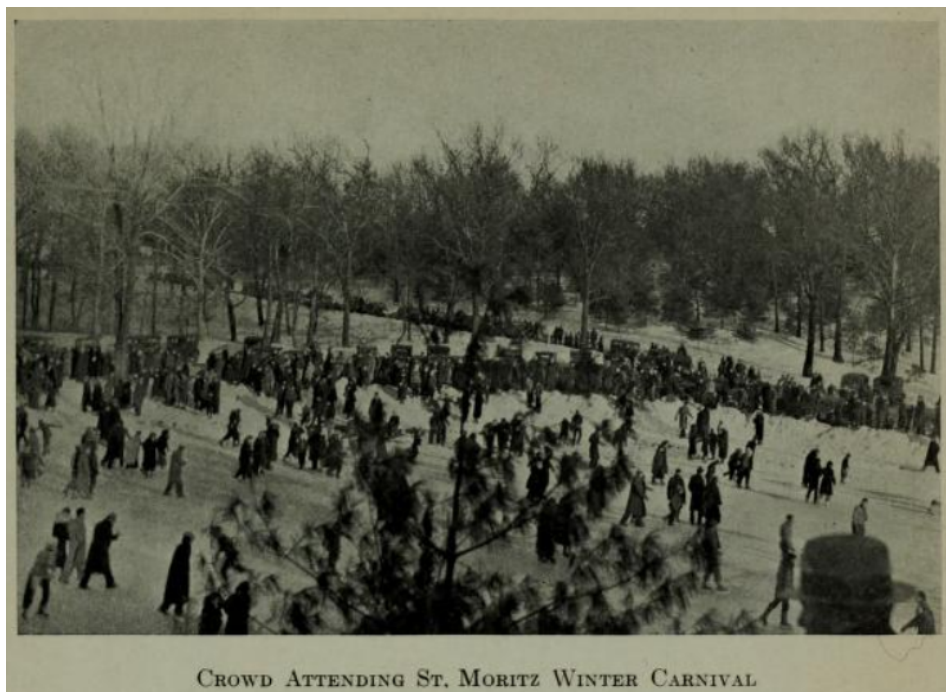
The “St. Moritz of the South Shore”, named after the 1928 Winter Olympics in St. Moritz, Switzerland was dedicated in Quincy in January 27, 1929 with a ceremony attended by 15,000 people. The facility included outdoor skating ponds, a toboggan run, a ski jump and a warming house. They held the “Winter Carnival” from 1929 through 1937, and in 1931 between 50,000 and 75,000 spectators attended.ⁱ



← Note the ski jumper in the air. This hill, although not the jump itself, is still there in the Blue Hills, just southwest of 4205.

The tower height was 14m (46'), and the K-Point was 30m (98').ⁱⁱ

“K-point, is a line across a ski jumping hill which indicates the hill's steepest point in meters. It was formerly used to classify the size of a ski jumping hill, and to calculate the number of points granted by a given jump. Since mid-2004, the hills are instead measured in hill size.”ⁱⁱⁱ



CROWD ATTENDING ST. MORITZ WINTER CARNIVAL

Downhill Skiing



^{iv} Downhill skiing got its start in 1935, when the CCC cut two trails on Great Blue Hill. These trails were laid out by Arthur Shurcliff, a landscape architect working as a consultant for the MDC.^v Skiing in 1935 wasn't the advanced sport we know today. If you wanted to ski down Great Blue Hill you started, not by buying a lift ticket, but by walking *up*, with your skis. You see while the CCC had recently cut the trails to ski down, no one had installed any mechanized method for getting you to the top.



And as for 'grooming the trails', again there was no mechanization, if you wanted work done on the trail, someone did it. Toward this end the CCC helped out as well.

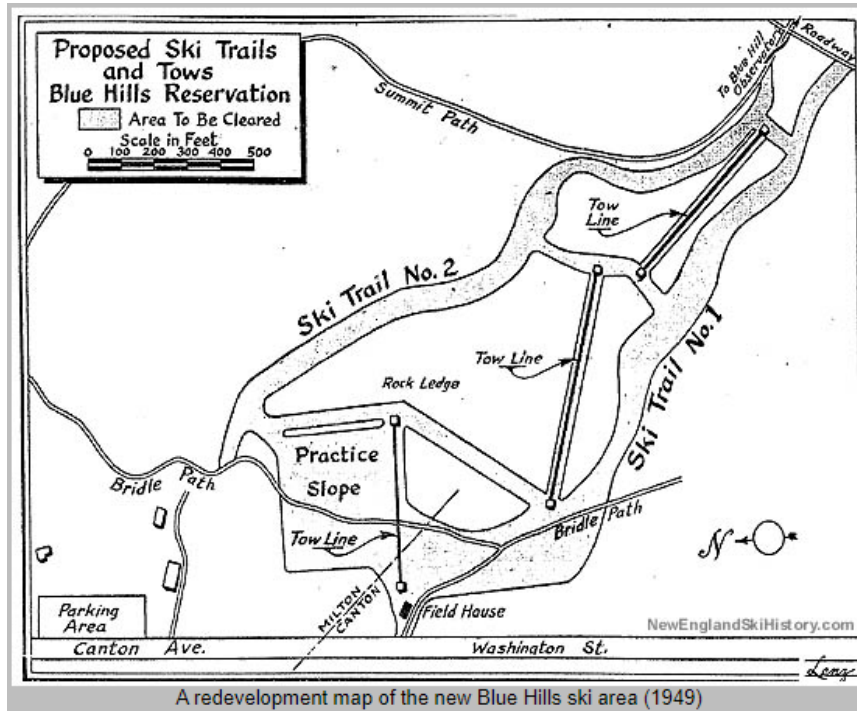
A CCC crew packing a trail in 1936

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The first rope tow had been installed in Quebec in 1932.

Mt. Gunstock had installed the world's longest tow rope in 1935. ^{vii}



A redevelopment map of the new Blue Hills ski area (1949)

It wasn't until 1949 that the Blue Hills ski area began the transformation into the ski area we know today. That year major improvements were made, including the addition of two rope tows to get skiers back up to the top after they skied down. A third rope tow was installed in the new practice area, an open area located at the bottom between the two main ski trails. Mt. Cranmore's Hannes Schneider was brought in to oversee the construction. The tow lines were built by Walter Stadig.^{viii}

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Of course, now there have been many improvements made, such as installing lights to allow night skiing.



And installing snow making capabilities. Did you know that during the ski season they put 16,000,000 gallons of water on the slopes in the form of snow? That is done with a combination of fan guns and stick guns. They use nineteen fan guns that they can move around to the ski area to make snow where needed. They also have twenty stick guns that are permanently mounted along the race course on Big Blue.^{xii}

Whatever *your* favorite winter activity is... Get to the Blue Hills and do it!

Bob Vogel

ⁱ <https://www.newenglandskihistory.com/Massachusetts/bluehills.php>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.skisprungschanzen.com/EN/Ski+Jumps/USA-United+States/MA-Massachusetts/Quincy/2080/>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Construction_point

^{iv} <https://archive.org/details/annualreportofme1935mass/page/6/mode/2up>

^v <https://www.newenglandskihistory.com/ccckitrails/Massachusetts/greatbluehill.php>

^{vi} <https://www.newenglandskihistory.com/ccckitrails/Massachusetts/greatbluehill.php>

^{vii} https://www.machovec.com/rope/sno_tow.htm

^{viii} <https://www.newenglandskihistory.com/Massachusetts/bluehills.php>

^{ix} <https://www.newenglandskihistory.com/ccckitrails/Massachusetts/greatbluehill.php>

^x <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/550017> Halberstadt, Ernst

^{xi} <https://www.newenglandskihistory.com/Massachusetts/bluehills.php>

^{xii} <https://www.bluehillsboston.com/snowmaking-101>