

A HISTORY OF

# King Pine SKI AREA



# KING PINE SKI AREA

## 60 YEARS IN THE MAKING

WRITTEN BY TOM EASTMAN

**“It all starts here” is the saying at King Pine, as generations of people have learned to ski as children and then return with their own children.**

**A family-owned and operated ski area for families for generations of skiers, King Pine in 2023 is celebrating 60 years of family fun.**

Sixty years is a milestone well worthy of celebration, and the small but mighty King Pine is standing tall.

Skiing in what Hoyt family members call “the valley” actually predates the installation of a double chair and three trails for skiing for the Dec. 29, 1962 opening of King Pine.

It goes back to December 1938, when late King Pine founder Milt Hoyt installed a rope tow below Bald Ledge. It was located out behind the former site of the Millbrook Lodge that once served as the Hoyt family’s household and the main office of Purity Spring Resort which was removed in 2020.

The Hoyt family’s connection to the region goes back to when Milt’s grandparents Mercy Hood Hoyt and Edward Eaton Hoyt of New York City used to visit his grandmother’s sister, Martha Hood. Martha was married to Nicholas Blaisdell, who sometime after 1852 was overseeing the operations of a thriving mill – the site of today’s Mill building indoor pool, fitness center and resort check-in center. Millbrook began its existence as the “Blaisdell Cottage,” a saltbox-style home built in the 1800s using timbers hewn at a lakeside mill owned by the Blaisdell family.

Milt’s grandparents ended up purchasing a nearby farmhouse as a vacation property, and the Hoyt name would become part of Purity Lake.

Milt’s grandfather and father starting in the late 1880s through 1900 tapped the spring there across from Millbrook and then bottled it for shipment to major cities of the Northeast and beyond.

Through the help and guidance of a summer resort guest, Milt had moved to Rhode Island to first attend Moses Brown School for a post-graduate year and then Brown University.

He started his boys camp, Camp Tohkomeupog (Native American for “spring water”) for Boys in 1932. During his years at Brown, Milt brought carloads of people to East Madison to spend weekends in the winter enjoying the relatively new sport of skiing. In 1938, he cleared some trees from a hill behind Millbrook and constructed a rope tow.

Powered by a Ford Model A engine, this rope tow would be the first of several lifts to transport skiers to the higher reaches of the valley. In 1939, Milt established overnight ski camps for boys and girls during school vacation weeks – the still-running February vacation week ski camp is said to be the oldest continuously running ski camp in the country, according to family members and resort officials. In leather boots on wooden skis, hundreds of people swooshed down the tiny hills around the lake. As the popularity of skiing increased, it would transform winter operations at the Inn, revealing year-round business possibilities.

Upon graduation, Milt took a teaching position in West Hartford, Conn. and spent his weekends and summers in the valley.



*Photo top: Rope tow at Purity Spring Resort | Photo bottom: Skiers at Purity Spring Resort circa 1960's*



In 1944, Milt left his teaching position to develop Purity Spring Resort into a year-round business.

“There was more to it than just the summer camp,” Milt shared with The Mountain Ear newspaper in an interview published in the paper’s June 29, 1984 article. “I wanted to help my father in his later years,” he said, noting that his father died in 1952.

Milt and Fran Hoyt made the former Blaisdell residence their home in 1944, and



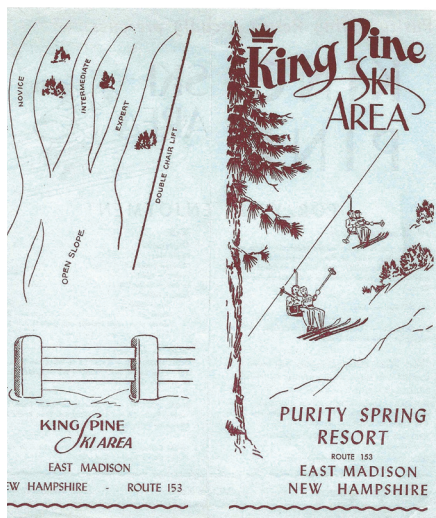
they would raise their five children — Ted, Bob, Laura, Kathy and Susie Hoyt — there while the lodging business that Milt’s parents, Edward Jr. and Gertrude Hoyt, had begun in 1911 grew.

Ted Hoyt, now 81 and mostly retired, recalled how he learned to ski at age 3 once the family moved to Purity Spring. He said the original Bald Ledge Trail was the longest of the four original trails that were

served by rope tows. It was built on an old class VI road. “It had a nice south-facing slope, and was a wide-open field with run of a few hundred yards. There was also a rope tow up the slight slope behind where the tennis courts are now off East Madison Road: The slope was much easier on one side and steeper on the other. Then there was the Barn slope and tow, where the tubing hill is now,” related Ted, adding that he remembers how in the ‘40s after a good snowstorm, guests at the inn would all sideslip the hills on their skis to get it packed down.

In the dry fall of 1947 – the fall of the Great Fire in nearby Brownfield, Maine – Ted says Purity Spring suffered a forest fire that melted the engine for one of the rope tows, which the family replaced.

Another major incident he recalled from his youth was a major blizzard in February



1952. East Madison, he said, was pretty isolated back in those days, and it took a few days for the plows to reach the resort, with Route 153 being closed for three days



in front of the resort. “I think they said it was 30 inches – there was a huge drift in front of the inn,” he said.

In 1962, the first trails were cut for the new King Pine Ski Area.

Serviced by a double chairlift, the new King Pine ski area initially consisted of three trails and an open slope. The Purity Spring rope tow operation overlapped with King Pine for one season.

According to the Dec. 27, 1962 Reporter newspaper of North Conway, “On Saturday, Dec. 29, this region will enjoy a new ski area, which is to be known as the King Pine Ski Area in East Madison. This is the first official season of the King Pine Ski Area, although many people found much pleasure on the rather small private ski area operated by E. Milton Hoyt, owner of the Purity Spring Resort. In fact, so many people did enjoy the skiing at Purity Spring and so many people asked why he didn’t enlarge the facility, that he finally did.”

“Throughout the summer if you have been driving Route 153 from Conway to Effingham Falls, you have undoubtedly seen the bulldozers and the construction gangs busily at work. Now we can tell the complete story: King Pine has three trails, one for novices, one for intermediates and one for experts, all of which come into a large open slope Uphill transportation is provided by a double chair lift.”

The newspaper provided further details, such as “a fine ski school is in operation ... and a ski shop is also on the premises. Neither have the Hoyts overlooked a nice snack bar to feed the eager skiers and besides this, there is a nursery under capable supervision which will take care of the children while ‘Pop’ and ‘Mom’ are on the slope.”

*Photos opposite page: Skiers at Purity Spring Resort and 1962 King Pine Trail Map | Photo above: Milt Hoyt and skiers on the first King Pine chair lift.*

Ted Hoyt says he can remember helping out with the development of the ski area that summer of '62.

"Because college counselors would come up for the summer camp, some would come up in spring and work over the summer and into the fall, and we all cleared trails," said Ted. "I remember my friend Dan Ustick and I having a competition one day in 1962 to see who could carry the biggest logs to the burn pile."

He recalls that almost all of the work creating the ski area was done "in-house as much as possible – except, obviously, the lift installation had to use the lift company." It was a way of life at King Pine, with Milt able to tackle almost any project and using staff to help achieve those goals over the years.

The ski area was christened "King Pine" after the large King's pines mast trees that were earmarked for the Royal Navy in the 1700s, two of which stood in what was cleared for the ski area parking lot. Lightning later struck the tallest and they were removed sometime in the early '70s, according to Ted Hoyt. (According to Ted's cousin Robert "Tex" Gillard, son of Milt's sister Ellen Hoyt Gillard, the lumber was later used for the bar when Trail's End Tavern was built).

"You could see those two tall pines behind the ski area sign," said Rev. John Hughes, pastor of the Conway Congregational Church, who is a former counselor, ski instructor and ski patroller, who with Gillard and other veteran King Pine staffers

such as Marnee Lancashire shared their memories at a potluck supper held at the church's Fellowship Hall this past December.

They all recalled being part of something bigger – at a small mountain, nonetheless, and it was a commitment to making King Pine the best it could be.

Gillard, 76, says he got his nickname when at the age of 5 he arrived at Camp Tohkomeupog from Connecticut wearing cowboy boots and a cowboy hat with a toy six-shooter. The name has stuck through the years, spending all of his vacations growing up at Purity Spring and then King Pine, and later working there as a ski instructor.

"People would do anything for Uncle Milt," related Gillard. "He just had a way about him – and he would do anything for anyone. He was a great guy to work for."





Lancashire, 74, a longtime ski area staffer in ticketing at both the ski area and in summer at the Bluffs at Danforth Bay camping area, used to come to the girls' summer camp and ski camps and recalls one winter evening when Milt gave her and friends a ride to dinner at the first Tecumseh Hall (it burned in fall 1975 and was replaced by today's Tecumseh) in some sort of construction equipment.

"We used to ski all day," she said, "and we'd come home at the end of the day at 4 o'clock, shower and get dressed. And we'd walk back up to Camp Tecumseh. And then we'd walk back down at the end of the night. But one night, as we were headed to dinner, Milt was coming by and he was driving a piece of machinery with a bucket on it. He said, 'Girls! Climb in!' So, we did – can you imagine doing such a thing nowadays?!"

NewEnglandSkiHistory.com notes that the remaining rope tow from those early days may have operated for guests periodically into the 1970s. The King Pine facility was improved in 1964, when a J-Bar was added for beginners with two new trails. Business grew during the 1960s, including a 15 percent jump in 1966-67.

Through the efforts of then ski school director Bun Nickerson and future MWV Chamber of Commerce director Peter Pinkham, then of the Eastern Slope Inn in North Conway, King Pine organized the first Masters Ski Competition at King Pine in 1966. The area was nearly doubled in size in 1968 when the North Side area was developed with three new trails and an open slope and an addition to the base lodge, featuring an enlarged snack bar and the addition of a locker room and sun deck.

The expansion was a challenging one, as Milt Hoyt nearly drowned in a swamp where the base of the chairlift was to be constructed.

Then, after much of the lift was installed, the project was halted due to delays in delivery of the electronics. Things finally came together in January 1969, when the new complex opened.

*Photo opposite page: Ski & Snowboard Camp group | Photo above: The Black Bear lift opens in 1969*



Milt and Fran divorced in the 1970s, with Milt then marrying Peggy Hoyt. In 1976, Milt handed the day-to-day management duties down to his and Fran's children, Ted, Laura, Bob, and Susie – the fourth generation (daughter Kathy did not opt to work at the resort, working in insurance and moving to Madbury).

Ted handled accounting and the camp in summer and winter lodging; Laura was a jack of all trades, also handling bookkeeping and human resources; Bob



was general manager of the ski area in winter and oversaw lodging in summer; Susie oversaw food operations and later became involved in gardening in summer and accounting.

“My Dad, Milt, was a pretty good skier; my Mom, Fran, didn’t ski much, and later Dad got into snowmobiling,” said Susie, now retired from the resort. She resides in a home near the original Bald Ledge rope

tow and slope and pursuing her love for creating sculptures. “My mother her entire life (in the hospitality business at the resort) was the most gracious lady you could ever imagine. She was warm and welcoming to everyone – and after she died, Laura pretty much took that role over as the matriarch, having her hand in just about everything for the staff and guests.”

“My brother Bob,” she continued, “was definitely the member of the family who was probably the most passionate about skiing,” related Susie Hoyt for this ski area history. A fellow member of the Kennett High Ski Team member with future 1972 Olympians Tyler and Terry Palmer of Kearsarge and David Currier of Madison, Bob loved to go fast – a zest he continued all his life, note friends.





“Bob was a year or two older than me and he used to beat me back in high school on a pretty regular basis,” Tyler Palmer shared for this program. “He was very solid on his



skis and he never got thrown around much – I don’t ever remember him falling down and not finishing. He was a very good racer and skier.”

Big changes were made in the 1980s under Bob Hoyt as general manager’s leadership, including the installation of snowmaking after the snowless winters of 1979-80 and ’80-81.

Another big addition was the installation of chairlift-served night skiing in 1982-83, initially on weekends and vacation weeks. In subsequent seasons, night skiing was expanded to more trails and nights and has become a key part of operations, with King Pine now staying open nightly to 6 p.m. and planning to operate until 8 p.m. on Tuesday nights.

Starting in 1987 with the installation of the Polar Bear triple chairlift (and a doubling in size of the base lodge), King Pine underwent a steady campaign of modernizing its infrastructure with a new rental shop. A new J-bar was added along with a new beginner slope.

In 1990, the covered Tohko Dome was built, offering skating in winter and basketball and rock climbing in summer.

In 1993, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing were added using trails at the Reserve at Purity Spring, on the site of a former girls’ camp (Wampineauk, an approximation of the Native Americans’ word for “pure water”) that Milt’s sister Ellen had operated there beginning in 1934 through 1977 when she retired, after which it was discontinued in 1980.

*Photos opposite page: Snowmaking pipe being prepared for installation & Alpine racers at King Pine | Photo above: Early snowmaking at King Pine Ski Area*

The reserve was added following Ellen's death in 1989 and is protected by the New Hampshire Audubon Society and named in honor of Ellen and Milt's parents.

Following the closure of King Ridge in central New Hampshire, King Pine acquired a modern CTEC triple chairlift. Portions of it were used to install the Powder Bear Triple in 1996, followed by the Black Bear Triple in 2006, along with a new steep trail, Pine Brule.



At that point, each main lift had been upgraded to a modern, higher-capacity triple chairlift.

Night skiing was also expanded, as lights were installed on Scotch Pine for the 1996-97 season.

Non-skiing offerings were expanded for the 1997-98 season, when a snow tubing facility opened. In 1997, a Carousel was

added to the Learning Center, and in 1999 a Wonder carpet lift was installed.

In 2012, for its 50th anniversary, King Pine switched its snowmaking system from electric to more eco-friendly and more efficient diesel. For the 2017-18 season, King Pine added nearly a mile of 3-inch snowmaking pipe with new 4-inch pipe, providing additional water to an enlarged fleet of snowguns. Most recently, for the 2021-22 season, in addition to annual investments in maintaining and upgrading its lift and snowmaking infrastructure as well as updating its ski and snowboard rental fleet, King Pine purchased a new Prinoth Bison Snow Groomer.

Milt Hoyt was tragically killed at age 76 in a snowmobile accident in January 1988 when he was struck by a passing motorist while crossing Route 153 in front of the resort.

Following the death of Bob Hoyt in 2020, Andrew Mahoney – Laura and Jack Mahoney's son, and a member of the fifth generation – stepped up from assistant general manager to become ski area general manager and is director of the summer camp. His cousin Steven Hoyt (Ted's son) is primary assets manager, handling accounting and a lot of behind-the-scenes water testing work.

The company two years ago partnered with Highway West Vacations to help manage Purity Spring Resort, King Pine Ski Area, Tohkomeupog Summer Camp for

Boys and Danforth Bay Camping & RV Resort. Though the Hoyt family remain owners of the business entities and retain involvement in the day-to-day business, as well as local community involvement, Highway West Vacations was sought as a partner to help improve business practices including operating systems, revenue management platforms, human resources, marketing strategies and providing support to enhance the current hospitality approach for guests, skiers, campers, and employees.

“King Pine is and always has been the sum of its parts, and that is a legacy that was passed on through the generations,” said Andrew Mahoney. “It’s a high priority for all of us to honor that legacy.”

Concurred his cousin, Steven Hoyt, assets manager, “It’s great to be part of our family’s legacy here at Purity Resort and to carry on that tradition of hospitality.”

It’s a generational tradition that one feels the moment you arrive. In an era of corporate ski area consolidation, King Pine shines as an independent, family-owned and operated ski area that has kept step by upgrading its amenities while never forgetting its family-friendly roots.

Top-to-bottom, 100 percent reliable snowmaking, a great ski school, a fun learning area, a tubing park, night skiing, ice skating, cross country skiing, and a cheery base lodge with entertainment at Trails End Tavern Saturdays for apres ski

round out the resort’s appeal. Add the Monday Pioneer Race Series, and you see why people love King Pine.

“We find that we get young families who learn how to ski here and then as skiers get older, we might lose them for a spell to larger areas – but then when they have children, we find they come back with their kids so they can learn on our friendly slopes,” said Thomas Prindle, marketing manager.

Offering something for all ability levels, it’s a small mountain with a vertical of only 350 feet – but also with small lift lines, so you get your runs in, for sure.

The namesake tall “King’s pine” that once stood in King Pine’s parking lot may long be gone – but the roots of King Pine’s bonds among generations of skiing and riding families remain as strong as ever, with the resort standing tall among family-owned and operated ski areas

So, grab your skis or snowboard, and get out there after a cup of hot chocolate in the cheery lodge, just as generations have done before you.

For more information, visit [kingpine.com](http://kingpine.com).

*Photo opposite page: Installation upgrade of the Black Bear lift*



# *A 60TH ANNIVERSARY HISTORY OF KING PINE SKI AREA BY TOM EASTMAN*

Tom Eastman is an award-winning writer and ski historian who has covered the snowsports scene in Mount Washington Valley for 43 years, first for the Mountain Ear weekly for 28 years and for the past 15 years for The Conway Daily Sun. He first skied King Pine as a 9-year-old on family ski trips from Portsmouth, N.H., and still recalls the first time in high school when he made it down Pitch Pine.

