

## MORE THAN A SKI HILL:

# FROM PASKAPOO TO CANADA OLYMPIC PARK

by J. Thomas West



It has been said that wherever a Norwegian ever settled a ski jump would soon appear.<sup>1</sup> This also applied to Canada Olympic Park but it just took a little longer. Some of the men behind the development of the ski hill that became known as Paskapoo were of Norwegian descent. Their desire to promote skiing in the Calgary area and the entrepreneurship of others who supported their work, led to the development of a ski hill eventually would be called, *"the premiere site of the XV Olympic Winter Games."*<sup>2</sup>

Most accounts on the history of the Paskapoo Ski Centre, as it came to be known, credit three men: Clarence HAAKENSTAD, Fred CUMMER and Bob ELIAS, as the project's pioneers.

It is the opinion of this author that Haakenstad takes the prize for being the one who initiated the idea in the first place. His enthusiasm for skiing began a quest in Calgary to develop a suitable local hill that would help people become proficient before they tackled the challenging mountain slopes two hours west of the city.

An active member of the University of Alberta Ski Club, Clarence HAAKENSTAD had moved from Edmonton in 1951 to begin employment with *General Motors* with the hope of developing a successful business career. His family had immigrated to Canada from Norway,

from a village not too far from Lillehammer. As with most Norwegians, they brought with them a heritage of skiing and a desire to continue that interest. An uncle had been Holmenkollen champion in 1926.<sup>3</sup>

*"I was on skis from the time I was 4, pretty well [...] all of us kids were on skis when we were young. We did cross country. We did a little basic jumping. In my teen years I started to make it to*

*the deep snow country. We were envious of the Calgary people who could get up to Norway and Sunshine and [...] that was our aim. I got up there in the late 30's for the first occasion."*<sup>4</sup>

However, while Calgary did after the relative proximity to the Rocky Mountains and deep snow conditions it presented a major challenge to anyone who loved to ski. That challenge was the chinook, the warm dry wind that strips moisture from the ground and considerably moderates Calgary's winters. Clarence noted that there were hills and a good nucleus of skiers who made it to Banff regularly but had no real opportunity to ski locally.

Throughout the 1950's Clarence and others in the local ski community had searched for the hills and the snow that would provide the conditions to ski closer to home. It had been a search that took them as far west as the Kananaskis Valley and while these treks did lead eventually to the development of ski areas like Fortress Mountain, it was not what he and others had wanted.

*"There was considerable wind at elevation. The search therefore, explored the Turner Valley where a satisfactory hill was operating and to Jumping Pound country, but access roads were very difficult. The search went on hold until I got some new ideas."*<sup>5</sup>

The new idea was the snow making which still was in a fairly rudimentary form in the eastern United States.

1 SERAFINO, Gladys/WEST, Tom, "Mining is our Bread; Skiing our Soul: Norwegian Immigration and the Development of Skiing in Western Canada." A paper presented to the International Ski History Congress, Oslo, Norway. 1999.

2 This was the theme developed by the Marketing Department at Canada Olympic Park shortly after the Olympic Winter Games in 1988.

3 Interview by the author with Clarence HAAKENSTAD, December 17, 2001.

4 Ibid.

5 *The Story of Paskapoo*. Undated and unsigned type written document in the personal papers of Clarence HAAKENSTAD. The author is HAAKENSTAD, P.I.

*"In December of 1957 I noticed an article in a Ski Magazine which referred to snow making as a 'fact that worked' was being pioneered in an Eastern American state. I contacted Ski Magazine and was referred to Mr. William A. Walsh in New Hampshire, who I contact [sic!] by telephone. He briefed me as to the rudiments of snowmaking, sent me the technical literature which seemed very exciting and quite workable."*<sup>6</sup>

William A. WALSH was the owner of the William A. Walsh Company, Snowmaking Services and Equipment. Correspondence moved somewhat slowly through the next year as he endeavoured to put together a workable business enterprise to successfully market his product.<sup>7</sup>

HAAKENSTAD, in a letter to Walsh in February 1959, expressed an interest in being a local distributor of the snow making system and described his progress in building his own business partnership.

*"To reply to the general tenor of your letter may I briefly outline for your consideration a little of the background of the people you are dealing with when you write to myself. Essentially we are an association of partners, two in number. We have both been very much attracted by your achievement in snow manufacturing. Mr. Fred C. Cummer is a graduate in engineering from one of our local universities and obtained his masters in petroleum engineering at the University of California in 1951. Cummer has been a skiing enthusiast both there (U.S.A.) and in Canada (his home). He has instructed at Echo Summit in California and having been on out University Skiing Team for a couple of years he has had approximately twelve years of experience all told. [...]"*

*My qualifications are those of a graduate in Business Administration in Commerce from the University of Alberta, with many years of skiing in all parts of the West, coaching and instructing and as a representative on our national Ski Bodies."*<sup>8</sup>

Fred CUMMER was a close friend, fraternity brother and neighbour of HAAKENSTAD'S. He remained involved as a partner with the Paskapoo ski enterprise right through to its purchase by the Government of Canada in 1984.

There appears to have been no further contact with WALSH until HAAKENSTAD sent another letter in December reminding him of their interest.<sup>9</sup> WALSH responded quickly in January explaining that consultations on the construction of a new ski area had occupied his time for several months. He went on to explain in some detail the basic requirements of a snow making system.<sup>10</sup>

He did follow up on HAAKENSTAD'S request and shipped out three nozzles at a cost of \$8.00 each to permit the small partnership to begin testing in Calgary.<sup>11</sup> The testing was done in the east Calgary neighbourhood of Inglewood.

*"We rigged them up, went down to east Calgary, at Evergreen Irrigation Sprinklers, where we had to have water at a certain pressure and volume, and air at a certain pressure and volume. It was really quite simple. We set up this device, one evening, and started plumbing snow out over the grounds and across the ground and the road"*<sup>12</sup>

HAAKENSTAD immediately telephoned a local bank manager with the *Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce*, Jack DOUGLAS, and made arrangements to see him the next day. DOUGLAS had worked in Banff and was a known skiing enthusiast. The project started to pick up speed. By May 4, 1960, HAAKENSTAD wrote to WALSH informing him of the efforts to acquire a site and that they now had four partners involved.<sup>13</sup> One of them was Bob ELIAS a "landman" with *Texaco* who was instrumental in pulling together the parcels of land required to make a ski hill. The fourth was Dr. Gordon MINTY. A fifth partner, Elmer BERG, who was the owner of *Telstar Drugs*, came on board by the end of 1961.

He too was of Norwegian heritage and

6 Ibid. p.2.

7 Correspondence. Letter dated January 28, 1959, William WALSH to Clarence HAAKENSTAD. Haakenstad personal papers.

8 HAAKENSTAD to WALSH, February 5, 1959. Haakenstad papers.

9 HAAKENSTAD to WALSH, December 17, 1959.

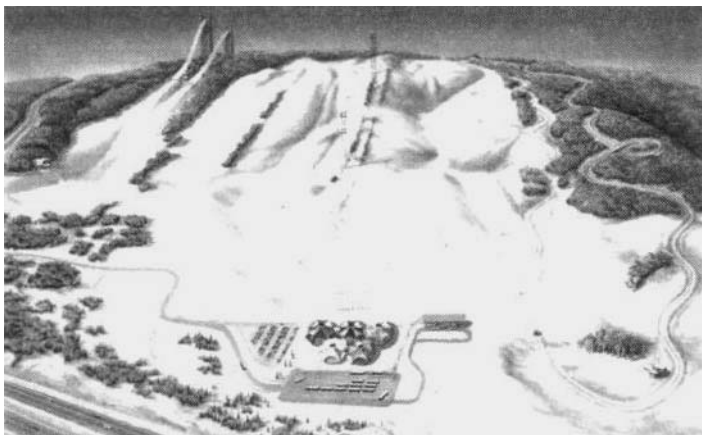
10 WALSH to HAAKENSTAD, January 16, 1960.

11 WALSH makes reference to this in a letter to HAAKENSTAD dated September 14, 1960. The letter appears on the letterhead of the *R.A. Dumas Sales Company Inc.*

12 HAAKENSTAD interview with the author, December 17, 2001.

13 HAAKENSTAD to WALSH. December 7, 1960

14 File: "Paskapoo" in the archives of the Olympic Hall of Fame. Undated and unsigned typewritten document listing the owners of the Paskapoo Ski Centre.



from the Camrose area of Alberta, a well-known hotbed of skiing.<sup>14</sup> Altogether, they had assembled \$20,000 to finance the project.

They had other influential people involved as well. HAAKENSTAD asked WALSH to meet with the individual involved with their planned ski rental operation, William SIEBENS, who was in New York on business. Bill SIEBENS and his father, Harold SIEBENS, owned the *Siebens Oil and Gas Company*. In 1985, they were the benefactors who financed the building of the Olympic Hall of Fame at *Canada Olympic Park* as their personal contribution to the Olympic Games effort.<sup>15</sup>

The following December HAAKENSTAD reported on the incorporation of *Paskapoo Development Limited* and that the partners had 18 acres of ski area under development on "the edge of the city, population 240,000, being serviced with lines laid underground, 7 foot hydrant valves and lateral lines."<sup>16</sup>

The land had been owned by a local farmer, Joe RATTAI, and was located just outside the community of Bowness on the city's western outskirts. Part of it had been a golf course that had been cut in half a few years earlier when the new Trans Canada Highway had been built.

HAAKENSTAD went on to report that the best vertical drop was 337 feet, on a run of 1300 feet that was serviced by two rope tows. The project had drawn the notice and skepticism of the local press. Dave COLE, a ski columnist for the *Calgary Herald* had written the comment in November, "*Bowness skiing is for the birds, you might as well go skin diving in the Sahara.*"<sup>17</sup> The *Calgary Ski Club* had tried

for several years before to ski in the approximate same area but had given up because of the lack of snow.

The group was moving quickly. Municipal approval of their project had been given on October 25. On December 26, 1960, the Paskapoo Ski Centre opened for business, which consisted mainly that day of charging a dollar a car to let people come in and watch snow making.<sup>18</sup> An official opening took place on February 5, 1961.

It was a small start. They had two rope tows, limited snow making and a run cut out of the woods which today is immediately west of the present ski jump complex. A "lodge" of sorts was put into place when Haakenstad found an abandoned building, an old military Quonset hut, at Lincoln Park in the city. Using his connections he received permission to move the building to the ski hill. Inside was a supply of kiln dried lumber stored there and forgotten. It was quickly used to supply an outside deck.

They took the name from the Paskapoo sandstone formations found on the land.

Somewhat unstable and prone to erosion, the lands east of the site were heavily ravined by several underground springs. Eons earlier the land had served as a wonderful buffalo harvesting area for the natives encamped there. Archaeologists have uncovered a buffalo kill site on those lands that is estimated to be over 8,000 years old. The term Paskapoo, is a local native term for "blindman", and related to a legend on snow blindness and a hunting party that suffered from it while travelling in the winter in central Alberta. The Paskapoo Ski Centre was quick to say that "paskapoo" meant "glorious descent". Others said it meant "hard landing" in reference to the frequently icy conditions encountered on its slopes.<sup>19</sup>

However, as HAAKENSTAD noted the site had many advantages that would contribute to its long term success.

"We had to have north exposure that is away from the sun that is facing north. Had to have a reasonably sized area, well a hundred to two hundred acres, which we couldn't get fight at the

15 Ibid.

16 COLE, Dave, "As I Ski It", *Calgary Herald*. November 18, 1960.

17 *The Story of Paskapoo*, p. 3.

18 As recounted by Clarence HAAKENSTAD, December 17, 2001.

19 Ibid.

beginning, but we gradually grew into it. It had to be close to a city of reasonable population, preferable on the west side toward Banff. To be close to a water source, and the usual infrastructure. We had everything except sanitation which we installed ourselves."<sup>20</sup>

The enterprise functioned on limited cash and sweat equity. It was difficult in the first few years. The *Herald* sponsored Saturday ski school with free lessons, hot dogs and pop as well as publicity. By February it was happy to report over 500 registrants.<sup>21</sup> However, there were a lot of evenings when the hill saw only two or three customers. HAAKENSTAD and his partners would leave day jobs to make snow at two or three in the morning.

Despite a lot of local support and the volunteering of time by many sports people the struggle became too much for HAAKENSTAD. In 1968, having seen his dream get underway to the point where it covered its expenses he sold his shares to devote more time to his family. His departure marked the end of the first chapter in the history of Paskapoo.<sup>22</sup>

Within six years of opening the owners behind Paskapoo were making moves to further develop their ski hill. In 1967 they sold \$200 debentures to the members of the Paskapoo Ski Club, a separate organization, in order to finance some basic improvements. These included leasing additional land to the west to add another run, installing a *Dopplemeyer* T Bar, increased night lighting, a new water line hooked into the city's water supply and improvements to the day lodge and rental shop.

Alpine skiing was not the only concern of the Paskapoo site. At this time, a group of volunteers, under the direction of one Rolf BAKKE, constructed a ski jump and offered lessons at \$25.00 for a ten-hour week.

They were also looking across the road to find a manager for the operation. Joe COULLIARD was running a competing ski hill on the north side of the Trans Canada Highway 2 miles west of Paskapoo. Known as Happy Valley it was privately owned by a successful construction entrepreneur, Ernie LUTZ. LUTZ had, through visits to the United States, come up with the idea of developing a year round family recreational facility close to the city. The

result was a reasonable ski hill with a swimming pool for summer users.

Happy Valley had opened at about the same time Paskapoo had gotten underway and was operating with some success. However, it lacked the gradient of Paskapoo's slopes and its owner was beginning to lose interest in the operation. By 1968 a deal was struck and Joe COULLIARD found himself the new manager at Paskapoo and a shareholder in the corporation.

Joe COULLIARD had long been an entrepreneur in the ski business. Born in Fort MacLeod, two hours south of Calgary, he had attended the University of Alberta and worked in the retail side of the ski business in Edmonton. He had also instructed and done ski patrol work at several large mountain ski areas during his career. Although he believed that the Happy Valley operation was superior to that of Paskapoo at the time its owners came calling on him, he could also see that he had little future with his old employer.<sup>23</sup>

Over the next ten years he would be the main driving force behind Paskapoo. He saw the great potential for profit in small ski hill operations. Taking a cue from the successful Camp Fortune ski hill in central Canada he set out to make Paskapoo the most profitable ski hill in the country.

Within five years he had convinced his partners to raise \$500,000 through bank loans to invest in more development on the site. These included installing a double chair, great improvements to the snow making capacity, additional light towers and a new day lodge with 6400 square feet over two stories and a capacity to handle 350 people. He also tripled the parking lot's capacity.

COULLIARD was a direct hands on manager. His office was a small cluttered room in the basement of the day lodge but he was rarely found there. It was said that if you wanted to see Joe you went where the crowds were. At noon he would be helping to serve french fries in the cafeteria and at other times he would be checking the lift line ups.<sup>24</sup> When the new chair lift was installed he worked side by side with the construction team. He was not great at keeping records nor at leaving a paper trail, which some suggest was deliberate.

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20 *Calgary Herald*. February 3, 1961.

21 Haakenstad interview.

22 Ibid.

23 Interview with Joe Coulliard by the author, December 19, 2001.

24 Interview with Brian Murphy by the author, December 18, 2001.



Clearly he was successful in developing Paskapoo. In 1975 the day lodge saw more expansion and a new T bar was installed. Three years later a third floor was added to the Day lodge and a new triple chair was installed with mid station unloading. Another 15 acres were added to the property.<sup>25</sup>

That same year, 1978, another side of COULLIARD'S vision for the site was revealed. An alpine slide was installed to provide a summer attraction. The next year witnessed the development of a Go Kart Track and Golf Driving Range. All three were powerful revenue generators for the site and once in place required little in the way to operate them. According to Coulliard, the Go Karts and the driving range were "a license to print money"<sup>26</sup>

The ski operation, however, was always the focus of Paskapoo. In the 1970's the ski industry in Alberta was enjoying great growth. The City of Calgary was expanding rapidly under the stimulus of an oil industry boom that would last until 1982. Ski technology was improving too, which made it easier for people to learn the sport.

Looking at the equipment of the 50's and 60's Coulliard commented that "it was a miracle that anyone learned how to ski." With shorter skis and improved bindings a four-day lesson program as Paskapoo would produce mountain ready skiers. Evenings would generally see 450 adults in learning programs on the hill.<sup>27</sup>

In 1973, Junior Lessons for 7 ½ hours of instruction could be had for \$15. That price was doubled for the following year. In 1976 a junior

skier could take 15 hours of instruction for \$35. Eaton's, the major Canadian retailer at the time had been recruited as the Ski School sponsor.<sup>28</sup>

By 1979, the site had been consolidated to 210 acres. Skier visits were running at 250,000 annually. Each year 5000 adults were being taught to ski with an equivalent number of school children learning as well. 500 racers would train in the evenings and three successful Labatt's Pro Challenge dual slalom races had

been held, from 1978 to 1980. Staffing ran at 250 employees in the winter including an estimated 135 full time and part time instructors. Clearly Paskapoo had become a very busy and profitable ski factory for producing new skiers and for providing local recreational opportunities for Calgarians.

On September 30, 1981, the International Olympic Committee selected Calgary as the host city for the XV Olympic Winter Games to be held during February 1988. One of the motivations for bidding for the games had been to create a legacy of facilities for the development of future athletes, similar to those left in Edmonton when it hosted the Commonwealth Games in 1978. However, the bid proposal as accepted by the IOC proposed that many of the events, including ski jumping and the sliding sports of bobsleigh and luge be held at locations some distance from the city centre.

In 1982, David LEIGHTON, the President of OCO' 88, the games organizing committee, took his vice presidents on a fact-finding tour of other Olympic sites. Brian Murphy, a local area businessman and volunteer during the bid process, had been appointed as the Vice President responsible for sports. He returned from that trip very concerned that the plans to develop the sites as outlined in the bid, would create a series of "white elephants".

*"places like Lake Placid [...] were telling us in [their] ski jump they were having wedding ceremonies but no tourists. And then when we went to Innsbruck they were saying 'We wish we*

25 "Paskapoo" file. OHOFM Archives.

26 Coulliard interview.

27 Ibid.

28 "Paskapoo" file.

29 Murphy Interview.

*had all our facilities right downtown, so our tourists could get at them. ' And then we got to Sarajevo and they said, We've got all these potential white elephants, we should get them to downtown Sarajevo.'"*<sup>29</sup>

Conveying his concerns to his boss, MURPHY got LEIGHTON to agree to a thorough technical review of the proposed venues. His goal was to bring sites closer to the city so that they would benefit from tourist traffic to help pay their way once the Games were over.

As part of this process he was sent to look a Pigeon Mountain, a small ski hill located outside the Town of Canmore, which its owners were touting to OCO'88. Although believing that the site was not what was wanted he did the trip anyway. Fortunately, for history's sake, he was stopped by a red light on the Trans Canada highway outside Paskapoo. According to his account, as he sat waiting for the light to turn green, he noticed that the ski hill was for sale.<sup>30</sup>

MURPHY pulled his car off the road and looked at the hill more closely. He claims that he could see where the bobsleigh run and ski jumps would go. He completed his trip to Canmore but he knew that Paskapoo would be ideal for his Olympic venue planning. He had a local artist prepare a sketch of what the site could look like and took it forward to his management team.<sup>31</sup> Frank KING, then Chairman of the Board of OCO'88 would later write, *"It was one of those 'Eureka!' ideas that instantly grab you."*<sup>32</sup>

The idea didn't grab MURPHY'S boss, David LEIGHTON. LEIGHTON'S comment, when he heard the proposal was, *"Murphy, there is no way, we are putting an Olympic venue on that pimple of a ski hill west of Calgary."*<sup>33</sup>

David LEIGHTON'S days were numbered, however. By the end of the year the Board of OCO'88 would terminate his contract and replace him with Bill PRATT as President. Brian Murphy's "Eureka!" idea prevailed. By 1983, the Government of Canada had agreed to buy the

*"pimple of a ski hill"* as part of its contribution to the Olympic Games and to develop the facilities required for bobsleigh, luge and ski jumping.

After three appraisals and much negotiation with the owners Paskapoo was transferred to the government's ownership on March 31, 1984 for \$16.4 million. Joe COULLIARD, as a 20% owner estimated that his share in the deal was between \$2 and \$3 million.<sup>34</sup>

Paskapoo underwent a name change and became Canada Olympic Park (COP). Its management became the responsibility of the Calgary Olympic Development Association (CODA), which had been the original Olympic bidding group and eventually was transferred responsibility for managing the legacy of endowments and facilities left from the Calgary Winter Olympic Games. For a time Joe COULLIARD remained under contract to manage the skiing operation but he finally severed his ties in 1987.

The original plan by Brian MURPHY was followed in the main in the development of the Olympic venue. A ski jump complex was constructed on the eastern perimeter consisting of 10M, 30M, 50M, 70M and 90M jumps. The variety of jumps was a clear indication of OCO'88's commitment to leaving a training legacy. The bobsleigh and luge track, a combined track for the sports was built on the westside. Both complexes were ready in time for the 1986-87 winter season when a series of pre-Olympic events were planned.

A large refrigeration plant was built on the north perimeter with a capacity equivalent to seven ice arenas. A training centre including a gymnasium, weight training areas, meeting rooms and accommodations for over 60 athletes was also built. Among the last of the facilities constructed was a new day lodge, later to be known as the *Frank King Olympic Visitors Centre*. It housed the ski operations, offices for CODA, food and beverage facilities and a retail store. It was ready in time for the Canada

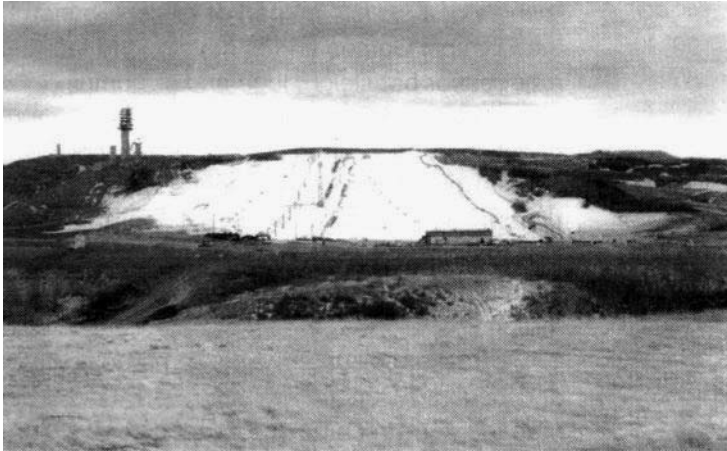
30 Ibid. Coulliard denies that the ski hill was ever officially for sale. Photographs taken about that time do not show a realtor's-sign or a "For Sale" sign.

31 Murphy. The artist was Murray Hay.

32 Frank King. It's How You Play the Game. Script: The writers' group Inc. (Calgary, 1991) p.110

33 Murphy. The quote was confirmed by Bill Nield to the author two days later. Nield was OCO's Vice President of Finance and held a similar position with CODA until 2001.

34 "Paskapoo" File. Estimates vary widely as to how much the owners received. Coulliard claims it was as high as \$19.5M when tax considerations were taken into account. Besides Coulliard the owners at the time of sale were: Elmer Bergh, Dr. Gordon Minty, Fred Cummer, Wayne MacDougall and Dr. OlafMelvie. See also- Calgary Herald. Croasbie Cotton, "24 Year Old Paskapoo, now Canada Olympic Park. P.C2, April 1, 1984.



Olympic Park Open House on November 15, 1987. During the Games its main floor served as the media centre for the venue.

Immediately west of it was constructed a substantial mechanical building to house the staff and equipment for the day-to-day maintenance and operation of the park. The total re-development cost was \$72.9 Million including the original purchase costs. Government officials crowed that Paskapoo was native for "on time and under budget."

The last facility to open was the *Olympic Hall of Fame and Museum*. It was the result of a \$2.5 million gift from the SIEBENS family, of whom Bill SIEBENS had been involved with the original Paskapoo development in 1961. Its dedication occurred on February 12, one day prior to the Opening Ceremonies of the Olympic Games. IOC President, Juan Antonio SAMARANCH and Canada's Prime Minister, the Honourable Brian MULRONEY took part in that occasion.

During the Games Canada Olympic Park saw several Olympic firsts and its own share of controversies. Calgary's notorious Chinook winds caused postponements of the ski jumping competitions and raised concerns about the exposure of the jumps on the top of the ski hill. Dust from surrounding areas blew into the bobsleigh track causing delays and frustrations.

Yet, all of the scheduled events did take place within the Games timeframe and Canada Olympic Park made its contribution to what President SAMARANCH would call "*The best Winter Olympic Games ever.*"

Finland's great ski jumper, Matti NYKANEN, would write Olympic history by becoming the first to win three gold medals in his sport. Germany's great Georg HACKL would

begin an Olympic medal-winning streak in luge that continues to this day.

The Game's most infamous and unforgettable characters competed at Canada Olympic Park. The Jamaican bobsled team's efforts were eventually recorded in one of the most successful Disney Films ever produced *Cool Runnings*. The film itself was shot at COP. Britain's "Eddie the Eagle" EDWARDS won the hearts of millions for his efforts to compete without injury in ski

jumping. On February 23, the Games' largest crowd of 80,000 witnessed freestyle aerials, ski jumping and Nordic combined events at COP.<sup>35</sup>

On July 20, 1988 the ownership of Canada Olympic Park was transferred to CODA for the nominal \$1 cost. CODA now faced the challenge of operating a much more complex operation. Although CODA was funded with endowments exceeding \$85 Million (CDN), those funds were restricted by agreement and the park still had to operate efficiently and generate revenues to support its operations. At the same time it was now something much beyond a ski hill. It had to serve the needs of highly competitive athletes, recreational and learn to ski to skiers, tourists, and corporate client groups attending meetings, receptions and banquets. It was no longer a ski hill run for profit but also a major Olympic training centre with costly facilities like the track and ski jumps. Management had to answer to the demands of sports whose needs could run counter to daily business operations. Management also initially answered to a 40-person board, not just a small group of largely silent shareholders.

In spite of this, the original vision of the Games organizers has been fulfilled beyond their expectations. The ski hill remains a core revenue generator bringing over \$2 million annually in tickets, rentals and lessons. The construction of the ski jumps created tons of earth that were spread across the top of the hill increasing the length of runs and ski-able terrain. Initially the Games had a negative impact on the ski operations with annual skier visits dropping to half the original peak reached in 1981. This was particularly true in the bread and butter teen market, which all but disappeared. However, the advent of snow boarding in the early 1990's, brought the

return of the younger skiers or boarders and park management responded quickly to develop a special snow boarding facility (1991) of a quality to attract Olympic level participants and to be the site for the selection of the 1998 Olympic half pipe team. By the 1999/2000 season skier visit levels had been re-built to the 250,000 level. In 1991 COP enjoyed the prestige of being the first ski area to open in North America, a tribute to its efficient snow making operations. In the summer of 1998 a new \$1M fixed quad chair was added to the lift capacity. Two new "magic carpet" lifts were added during the winters of 2000 and 2001.

COP has enjoyed much success in the development of the Canadian bobsleigh team and program. Among the first athletes to arrive to try the sport following the 1988 Games was Pierre Lueders of Edmonton. He would win the first World Cup he entered as a driver, at COP in 1992. In 1998 he and his brakeman, David MACEachern shared gold medal two man honours in Nagano with the Italians, in a rare Olympic tie for first place.

The Canadian Bobsleigh Team and Bobsleigh Canada have made Canada Olympic Park their home. The same can be said for the Canadian Luge Association and its team members who are rapidly showing stronger international results. Skeleton has enjoyed success too in developing athletes at COP with two World Championship silver medals as a result. A former COP tour guide, Lindsay Alcock, won a World Cup gold medal at an international event in December 2001. The track itself regularly sees 15,000-17,000 descents for training and competition on an annual basis. Tourists can experience the track summer and winter with especially constructed bobsleds for that purpose.<sup>36</sup> In February 2001, The Ice House, a \$4.1 M building designed to provide year round training opportunities for sliding sport athletes was added to COP's inventory of facilities. Totally unique in the world it was the first new sports facility built since 1988.

The ski jump complex has been much less successful in producing champion athletes although it has seen a high degree of utilization. By 1996, 78,474 jumps had been

recorded in winter and 79,769 jumps had been recorded in the summer.<sup>37</sup> Nationally, the sport completely collapsed by the mid-1990's and CODA had to move in to rescue it and begin a re-building process. Despite the embarrassment of having qualified no one in ski jumping for the Olympic Games since 1992, a development team is well on track for the 2006 Games.

Canada Olympic Park has also capitalized on the growth in mountain biking and now offers a wide variety of trails in terms of terrain and difficulty for that sport's followers. Members of Canada's 1996 Olympic mountain biking team competed at COP during the summer of 2000 and declared its course on par in difficulty with the one offered in Atlanta.

Tourism has been an important revenue source. A tour program of the facilities was in place the summer prior to the Olympic Games. It, along with the Olympic Hall of Fame and Museum attracted an average of 75,000 annual visitors since 1988. When one factors in road vehicle counts, tourists, food and beverage clients, skiers, athletes in training and competition, and spectators at events, an estimate of 1 million annual visits is reasonable.

Through 1997 and 1998, additional parcels of land were added to buffer the park from the city as development began to encroach on it. Its total size now approaches 600 acres. One parcel, immediately east of the original site has a significant historic background, important to the development of the city itself.

The challenge now for Canada Olympic Park is the growing age of its facilities. The continued changes and technical demands of sport could put these facilities at risk, especially as they near the end of their 25 year lifespan. To meet this concern the CODA Board has already commissioned and received a Master Planning Report from an international team of consultants. The results of that study were released to the public on January 28, 2002 and called for the construction of \$260 million of new facilities to support Olympic winter sport at Canada Olympic Park.

To sum, in the words of the CODA Annual Report in 1997:

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36 The 1996 Annual Report. Calgary Olympic Development Association. It summarized 10 years of track operation as follows: site of competitions for the 1988. Olympics, 6 World Championships, 13 World Cup events and 217,967 descents.

37 Ibid. A review of the CODA Annual Reports provides an excellent overview of developments at Canada Olympic Park through the 1990's.



*"Canada Olympic Park represents the most visible shining example to the Olympic legacy where freestyle skiing, bobsleigh, luge and ski jumping events took place. The park has moved beyond the memory of 1988 and has established its own identity. Unlike other Olympic sites that were built for only one purpose and have since deteriorated from their former glory, Canada Olympic Park has not only survived its own existence, it has adapted and excelled."*

It is much more than a ski hill, indeed!