

# Walls tell the story in Bullwheel Bar

**W**alls can talk, at least those in Snow Summit's legendary Bullwheel Bar, and they tell an amazing story.

It's a tale of struggle and survival that led to eventual prosperity. The very evolution of a sport in Southern California, whose pioneers saw snowy ski slopes when others could only picture desert, is depicted in words and sometimes pictures.

There's no ski museum in Big Bear per se but the Summit Inn and in particular the upstairs Bullwheel Bar come pretty close. Old photographs—complete with descriptive plaques—trail signs, and memorabilia of all kinds are displayed on the historic-in-itself building's walls, from old rope tows and early generation snowmaking guns to a track from a Tucker snowcat and ancient ski patrol toboggans.

The vast majority of the equipment came straight from the resort's slopes, but not all. For instance at the top of the stairway a chair from the old Clifford Lynn lift, the first lift in Big Bear that dates to 1947, is prominently displayed. So are rope tow wheels from the area that Snow Summit's Dick Kun and Chris Riddle happened upon many years ago while hiking in the area of the Lynn lift.

A mobile comprised of old trail signs dangles from the ceiling. Everywhere the eye looks there's early generation ski

equipment, from wood boards with bear trap bindings to straight-as-an-arrow skis from the modern era that aren't all that different from old equipment that still gets dragged out of closets and dusted off today.

"We spent most of a summer digging through old photos," Riddle said of the off season he and Kun, Snow Summit president whose mother Jo and stepfather Tommi Tyndall founded the resort in 1952. "He would dictate what was happening in each photo and I would get the little plaques made." Also displayed are early correspondences between Tyndall and the Forest Service, newspaper articles heralding the arrival of snowmaking, and much more.

Given that there's hundreds of photos both upstairs and down in the Summit Inn, that was no simple task. Old names, faces and events spring from them, like pictures of Tyndall on horseback exploring the property, early ski pioneers in action, even an early torchlight parade including the late Olympic ski hero Jimmie Heuga, one of the first two American men to medal whose career was cut short by the onset of multiple sclerosis. He would go on to found Heuga Center for Multiple Sclerosis and helped redefine how the disease is treated.

One of the Summit Inn's most distinctive landmarks is a building original: the



*History-laden Bullwheel Bar a great place to meet (above) or gawk at old ski stuff (right)*



dramatic towering stone fireplace. In front of it Tyndall, an accomplished accordionist, would entertain for hours after the ski day. Sometimes he was playing to deflect attention

from Snow Summit's early struggles, other times to dazzle investors. Always his upbeat mix of European and western tunes made for great bar parties, till his untimely death in 1964 at the age of 52 after the tractor he was driving in the rain flipped over.

Indeed music has always been a part of the Summit Inn's story. Many Saturdays starting at 3 p.m. see Ron Bertorello's band the Home Boys playing a party mix of music in the Bullwheel Bar. Bertorello has been a fixture in the bar, either as performer or patron since his first gig playing there in 1971.

"I did a party here for Ski Patrol," Bertorello said. "Even when I quit one year

to go to work for Goldmine (now Bear Mountain) I came back to play a party in here. It's not the rocking-est gig. People are in here usually talking at the end of their ski day. In all the years I've played here people occasionally get up to dance but it's definitely not a nightclub atmosphere."

He's joined at Snow Summit by bass Mark Bell and drummer Bill Gray, comprising the same trio that plays lakeside during summer at B's Boathouse, where they're known as Full Deck. By any name the music is the same, ranging from "Margaritaville" to "Mustang Sally" and "Tulsa Time."

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*Live music weekends with (L-R) Ron Bertorello, Mark Bell, Bill Gray*



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