NPS Form 10-900
(Oct. 1990)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

508

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Mt. Van Hoevenberg Olympic Bobsled Run

other names/site number

2. Location

street & number 220 Bob Run Lane ☐ not for publication

city or town Lake Placid ☒ vicinity

state New York code NY county Essex code 031 zip code 12946

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☒ nationally ☐ statewide ☐ locally. ☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.

Ruth L. Pierpont DSHPO 12/17/09
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

☒ entered in the National Register. ☐ See continuation sheet. — 2/4/10

☐ determined eligible for the National Register. ☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.

☐ removed from the National Register.

☐ other, (explain:)

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- [ ] private
- [x] public-local
- [ ] public-State
- [ ] public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- [ ] building(s)
- [ ] district
- [ ] site
- [x] structure
- [ ] object

Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
0	0	buildings
0	0	sites
3	0	structures
0	0	objects
3	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION/CULTURE

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION/CULTURE

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

N/A

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A
walls N/A
roof N/A
other earth, stone, concrete

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8 Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- [x] **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- [ ] **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- [x] **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- [ ] **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria considerations
(mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- [ ] **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- [ ] **B** removed from its original location.
- [ ] **C** a birthplace or grave.
- [ ] **D** a cemetery.
- [ ] **E** a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- [ ] **F** a commemorative property.
- [ ] **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation
Engineering

Period of Significance
1930-1932

Significant Dates
1932

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Stanislaus Zentzysky, designer
Leo A. Malone, builder; Henry Homburger, engineer

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography
(cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- [ ] preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- [ ] previously listed in the National Register
- [ ] previously determined eligible by the National Register
- [ ] designated a National Historic Landmark
- [ ] recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- [ ] recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data

- [x] State Historic Preservation Office
- [ ] Other State agency
- [ ] Federal agency
- [ ] Local government
- [ ] University
- [ ] Other

Name of repository: _____

Olympic Bobsled Run — Name of Property

Essex County, New York — County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property approximately 23 acres

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.) SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	18		
2			
3			
4			

[x] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kathleen LaFrank, Program Analyst

organization New York State Historic Preservation Office date January 2009

street & number Peebles Island State Park, Box 189 telephone 518-237-8643 x 3261

city or town Waterford state New York zip code 12188

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items
(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Town of North Elba

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

The Olympic Bobsled Run is located on the north side of Mt. Van Hoevenberg in the town of North Elba in the Adirondack Mountains of New York State. Mt. Van Hoevenberg is located within the Adirondack Park, a six-million-acre area of public and private land designated by New York State for conservation. The site is approximately eight miles east of the village of Lake Placid, which is in the northwest corner of Essex County. The entrance to the property is on the south side of NY 73 across from Round Lake. The site was carved out of wilderness and is surrounded by forested land on all sides. The one-mile-long access road takes a winding path up the mountain to the bobsled run, which is approximately 2,000 feet above sea level.

The one and one-half mile long bobsled run was constructed between August and December of 1930 and built specifically for the 1932 Winter Olympic Games. The bobsled run was the only facility for the 1932 Olympics constructed at this location. Events built for ice-skating were located in the village of Lake Placid itself, while the Intervale ski jump was constructed just outside the village on NY 73. A luge track constructed at this location for the 1980 Olympics is no longer extant. The nominated resource is now part of the Verizon Sports Complex, which provides facilities for cross-country skiing, hiking, and a biathlon course. Immediately adjacent to the bobsled run is a contemporary combined luge and bobsled run built in 1999; this feature replaced the 1980 luge track and was constructed on its site. A small portion of the 1999 combined run was built atop the path of the original bobsled run, destroying all evidence of the 1930 track in that location. The missing section, which included six hundred feet of track (of the original 7,820 feet) and one significant curve (Whiteface), has been excluded from the nomination. Despite this interruption, the original length, steep topography, and twisting route of the 1930 track are still apparent, enabling us to understand the significant events of the 1932 Olympics. The nomination boundary was drawn to include the two intact sections of the bobsled run and the original access road, which is parallel to it. The nomination excludes the missing section of track, all adjacent buildings and features, which are outside the period of significance, as well as the entrance road and parking lot, which have been expanded and modernized to accommodate larger crowds. The

☐ See continuation sheet

nomination includes three contributing structures: the bobsled run, the access road, and the original water tank, which is located near the top of the 1930 track.

The nominated bobsled run is a steep, narrow, serpentine structure. As built, the entire run was one and one-half miles long and ranged from six and one-half feet wide on the straight-aways to nearly twenty-two feet wide on the steepest grades, which were nearly perpendicular to the ground. The grade varied from 10-15 percent while the overall course dropped approximately 748 feet. The original course included twenty-two curves, two of them hairpin turns, and all were numbered and named. All but one of them survive. The two hairpin curves were called Whiteface (no longer extant) and Shady Corner Curve; while a third memorable curve was S-shaped and known as Zig Zag. The course was constructed using a combination of earth for the straight-aways and stone for the curves. The ice-covered surface, known as glare ice, was achieved by freezing a mixture of snow and water, which was then sprayed over the run, while the straight-aways received a covering of snow and slush so that the sled runners could hold the track. The run was constructed with eight thousand feet of pipe laid four feet underground to carry the water used in spraying the ice from a pond near the base to the top. The water pump was operated by a gasoline engine. Approximately twenty thousand gallons of water were used every twenty-four hours to maintain the course for Olympic events. At the top, water was held in a storage tank, which survives. The tank is a tall, vertical cylinder, riveted and strap-reinforced steel structure labeled: "The Goshen Steel Tank, Fairbanks, Morse and Co." It sits at ground level amid the ruins of what was apparently a wooden shelter of some kind. An original starting house at this location has been dismantled and stored; however, there is a remnant of the original platform on site. A second small wooden hut, known as the "curve hut" and located at Whiteface Curve, is no longer extant.

An intermediate starting house was also maintained at the half-mile mark just below Shady Curve. This small wood structure is no longer extant. The current building at this location, built c1961, is outside the boundary of the nomination. Seven small wood telephone booths were originally located at strategic points along the route.

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These formed a communication system, and one of them was also used in the operation of an electric timing device. The phone booths no longer survive. Original wooden spectator stands built at the three best vantage points (Whiteface, Shady and Zigzag Curves) no longer survive; however, new stands installed for the 1980 Olympics are extant.

Other buildings constructed for the 1932 Olympics included a clubhouse, sled storage shed, ticket booth, and service garage. All were simple wood frame structures with gable roofs and board siding built to resemble traditional Adirondack regional architecture. None of these buildings survive. The original clubhouse was located on the west side of the track at the finish curve. This building was demolished in 1973 and a new clubhouse was built on its site. The new clubhouse is outside the period of significance and has been excluded from the nomination boundary.

From the finish line, the track continues a short distance along an outrun before returning to a point where the sleds could be loaded on vehicles (originally large open sleighs drawn by crawler-type tractors, now trucks) for the trip back to the top. The sled barn/administrative office was sited at this location (east side of the track, across from the clubhouse). This building is no longer extant, and a new sled storage building was constructed in 1980 on a site to the northeast. The 1980 sled shed, which is outside the period of significance, has been excluded from the nomination boundary.

In 1934, the International Federation for Bobsledding established a one-mile distance as the standard for all future international competitions. To accommodate this change at Mt. Van Hoevenberg, the starting gate was moved one-half mile down, and the upper half-mile of track, above Whiteface curve, was abandoned. The original warming hut, a small wood frame building with gable roof, was moved to the new start location, where it continued to be used until 1980, when it was dismantled and moved to storage. Despite the lack of an ice cover, the trackside path, alignment, and earthen and stone structure of the section between the top and

☐ See continuation sheet

Whiteface Curve survives intact. Once overgrown, the upper section has recently been cleared and clearly illustrates its original design. It is also believed that the original water pipes survive below ground. In 1980, when the Olympics returned to Lake Placid, the one-mile bobsled run that had been maintained since 1934 was reconditioned for use in the winter games, and a new start house was constructed. The 1980 start house, which is outside the period of significance, is located in the section of the run that has been obliterated and is not included in the nomination.

From the start house down, the course was improved in 1980 by installing refrigerated pipes embedded in a thin layer of reinforced concrete on the surface of the track to allow for sledding in warm weather. Thirty-three miles of one and one-quarter inch black iron pipe was used to refrigerate the one-mile bobsled run. A single refrigeration plant was constructed between the bob run and a new adjacent luge track (later destroyed), so that one unit could be used to refrigerate both structures. The addition of refrigerated pipes did not disturb the bobsled run's original buried water line, which continued to be used to supply the water spray necessary to maintain the icy sliding surface. The half-mile start near Shady Corner Curve was still used for public sledding and driver training in 1980, and the road built for the 1932 Olympics was used to transport people and sheds to the starting gate. Other changes for the 1980 Olympics included installation of new bleachers and night lighting and enlargement of the parking lot. A path alongside the track was improved for pedestrian uses.

The other major change in 1980 was the addition of a refrigerated luge track adjacent and nearly parallel to the bobsled run. Although they shared a refrigeration unit, the two tracks were completely independent of each other. The luge track later developed structural problems, and in 1999 it was replaced by a large combined bob run and luge track on the same site. This new combined track is located north of the nominated bobsled run and is generally parallel to it; the 1999 structure is outside the boundary of this nomination.

☐ See continuation sheet

After the original bobsled run was closed for competition, it was adapted for public use. An additional half-mile at the top was closed to create a one-half mile course suitable for the public. Although not regularly used, the section closed in 1999 is intact, retaining its original path, alignment, earthen and stone structure, and ice cover. It also retains its 1932 water pipes and 1980 concrete lining and refrigeration system. The public course extends from the half-mile mark near Shady Corner Curve to the original finish line. This section, built in 1930, is intact to its original construction and 1980 alterations.

Integrity Analysis

Although there have been many changes to the site since 1932, the central and most important feature, the original bobsled run, survives with substantial integrity. It retains its original location amid a steep, heavily forested setting. It also retains most of its original design, structure, workmanship, and materials and clearly recalls the grandeur and thrill of the important events of 1932. With the exception of the six-hundred-foot section at Whiteface curve, the topographic, sculptural, and structural qualities of the run are entirely intact. Although the original buildings have been lost, the extant buildings accommodate the same functions and do not detract from setting. Because they are not associated with the 1932 Olympics, the main focus of this nomination, the contemporary buildings were excluded from the boundary of this nomination. However, many of the newer buildings are associated with the 1980 Olympics, an event that may be judged locally significant once fifty years have elapsed. If appropriate, the nomination boundary could be expanded at that time.

Although a small section of the structure has been destroyed, more than 90 percent of the run retains integrity of design, workmanship, and materials. These qualities are revealed in the serpentine shape, steep grade, narrow alignment, and overall drop in the track, as well as twenty-one of the original twenty-two curves. The intact section of the bob run also retains its original earth and stone building materials, underground water pipe system, 1980 refrigeration system, and original water storage tank. While an unfortunate loss, the section of missing track totals only 8 percent of the original bobsled course and does not prevent an overall understanding

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and appreciation of the topography and twisting route of the entire structure or the significant events associated with it. Finally, the combination of a spectacular natural setting and the ability to access, inspect, and understand the structure adequately conveys the historic sense of the period in which the significant events associated with this resource occurred. The bobsled run is internationally recognized for its association with the 1932 Olympics and the rise of bobsledding as a sport in the United States, and the site is recognized by tourists and athletes from all over the world. The Mt. Van Hoevenburg Bobsled Run is an early and singular example of its type, and it is associated with a nationally significant event. This is the only resource that represents the early history of bobsledding in the United States and its role in the 1932 Olympics.

The Mt. Van Hoevenberg Olympic Bobsled Run is nationally significant for its association with the 1932 Winter Olympics, for its role in the development of bobsledding in the United States, as a rare example of early bobsled run design and construction in the United States, and for its association with the development of Lake Placid as a center for winter sports in the United States. The bobsled run was constructed in 1930 after Godfrey Dewey, son of Lake Placid Club founder Melville Dewey, was successful in convincing the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to bring the 1932 Winter Games to Lake Placid. After persuading the committee that Lake Placid could offer facilities equal to the best European sites, Dewey was instrumental in securing funding, identifying event sites, and participating in the design and construction of sports facilities. Of the latter, the bobsled run was considered critical, and Dewey promised the committee a first-class run. Dewey took a personal interest in the bobsled course, which was the first of its kind constructed in the United States and the only one and one-half mile course ever designed and built for Olympic competition. Despite America's inexperience with bobsled runs, Dewey succeeded by securing the services of Stanislaus Zentzytsky, a renowned German course designer, who designed a course that was radically different from its European counterparts. The Lake Placid course was longer, steeper, and featured a more pronounced drop in curves than European runs, which allowed for steadier driving and faster speeds than those obtained on prior bobsled events. European teams praised the design, construction, and speed of the course, some asserting that it was the greatest bob run in the world. After the American team won two gold medals and one silver in 1932, bobsledding, previously unknown in America, captivated the country's interest, and U.S. teams dominated the sport until 1956. The Olympics brought worldwide attention to Lake Placid, which became a popular venue for professional sporting events. Over the next few decades Lake Placid hosted more international sporting events than any other place in the country, and the bobsled run, the only one in North America until the 1990s, drew athletes from all over the world for training and competition. Lake Placid itself expanded and grew into an important tourist destination, particularly for winter sports enthusiasts. The Lake Placid Olympics provided Americans with a much needed lift during the 1930s, as the nation was suffering the economic effects of the Great Depression. The bobsled run in particular, which facilitated one of its most thrilling events, played a significant role in bringing fame and

☐ See continuation sheet

prosperity to a remote corner of northern Essex County. The Mt. Van Hoevenberg Olympic Bobsled Run retains substantial integrity and is one of only twelve tracks in the world to have been approved for Olympic competition by the International Federation for Bobsledding.

North Elba

The town of North Elba, located in the northwest corner of Essex County, was settled in 1809 by Archibald McIntyre, who established the Elba Iron Works in 1810. A small settlement existed around the works until 1815, when McIntyre moved on to the Tahawas Iron Works. The town's early economy was based on lumbering and mining; however, Peter Smith's early purchase of a vast tract precipitated a decrease in population. In the 1840s, Smith's son, Gerrit, donated a large parcel, later known as Timbuctoo, to a group of free blacks so that they could establish farms and gain the voting rights that were contingent on property ownership. The town is also known for its association with abolitionist John Brown, who settled there in 1849 to assist the Timbuctoo residents with farming. Brown's farm, a National Historic Landmark, has been preserved as a New York State Historic Site. Farming was ultimately unsuccessful in the town, and today the majority of it has been incorporated into the New York State Forest Preserve. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the town also achieved worldwide fame for its role in American recreational history.

Tourism and Conservation in the Adirondacks

During the nineteenth century, the public perception of the Adirondacks evolved from a forbidding wilderness to an appealing tourist destination known for spectacular scenery and an invigorating climate. Among those who flocked to the region were wealthy families who built secluded private estates known as "Great Camps," their fanciful architecture inspired by alpine chalets. Less affluent or more transient visitors could stay in a variety of clubs, hotels, and boarding houses. The village of Lake Placid began to thrive as a tourist destination in the 1840s, and a number of public hostelries were established in and around the village.

☐ See continuation sheet

Among the most famous was the elite Lake Placid Club, a social and recreational association founded in 1895 on the shores of Lake Mirror (later Lake Placid) by Melvil Dewey (1851-1931), better remembered today for his library classification system. Originally known as the Placid Park Club, the organization faced financial difficulties almost immediately and lost many of its original members in 1896. Later the same year it was renamed the Placid Club. The club's first members were professors, teachers, clergy, writers, and librarians. Yet, despite its proclaimed association with people of intellect, the club denied membership to Jews and other minority groups, a prejudice that tarnished its reputation. In the early twentieth century buildings were winterized and the club was open for year-round activities. The club expanded greatly over the next decades, and by 1923 it encompassed 9,600 acres, included 356 buildings, and had a staff of 1,100. Its vast holdings included twenty-one tennis courts and seven golf courses. At its height, the club was a self-sufficient enclave for members, who could participate in a wide variety of family activities, including riding, golf and tennis.

Dewey's decision to keep the club open during the winter of 1905, supplying patrons with skis, toboggans, and sleds, is widely credited with laying the foundation for the development of competitive winter sports in the region. Dewey, with a great interest in winter sports, imported skis, built toboggan runs, developed individual ice skating rinks for curling, hockey, and figure skating, and built the original ski jump at Intervale. During the 1932 Olympics, Dewey's son, Godfrey, served as president of the games, and the Lake Placid Club served as the headquarters of the IOC. The Lake Placid Club prospered greatly in the decades after World War II; however, the club overextended preparing for the 1980 Olympics and it closed soon afterward. By that time, the village of Lake Placid was known internationally as a center for winter sports.

Meanwhile, in the decades after 1850, conservationists had begun working to reclaim the Adirondack region from the effects of resource-depleting industries such as mining, logging, and tanning. They achieved a significant victory in 1885, with the creation of the New York State Forest Preserve, 700,000 acres of state owned and protected land in the Adirondack and Catskill Mountains. In 1894 the "forever wild" clause was

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added to the state constitution, restricting all but the most passive development of state land in the region. While some interpreted this phrase literally, others advocated a "gentle" use of the forest for recreation. As it developed a state park system in the 1920s, the New York State Conservation Department promoted automobile tourism in the Adirondacks and encouraged citizens to use state-owned land for hiking, camping, and other low-impact recreational activities.

Winter Olympics[1]

At the beginning of the modern Olympic movement (1895), the competitions were almost entirely focused on summer games. Interest in winter games was limited to those in Nordic climates and those few countries with an established tradition of winter recreation. Even the Scandinavian countries, which boasted both the climate and the tradition, were initially reluctant to participate because of their suspicion that the games would be tainted by commercialism. Although some of the early Olympics included specific winter events, such as figure skating and/or ice hockey (London 1908, Antwerp 1920), it was not until 1925 that the IOC amended its charter to designate a separate week for winter sports. Nevertheless, the earliest winter games generally attracted fewer athletes and drew little international interest or participation. Both the 1924 and 1928 winter games, held in Chamonix and St. Moritz, were dominated by Scandinavian teams, particularly Norwegians.[2] Although American teams participated in both of the first two winter Olympics, the teams were casually chosen and ill prepared.

One of the effects of this want of worldwide interest was the lack of intense competition to host the winter games. Thus, the first three winter Olympics (1924, 1928, 1932) were all held in small communities, which took advantage of the increased attention and funding opportunities to bolster their reputations and sports

[1] This section primarily based on Stephen Essex and Brian Chalkley, "The Changing Infrastructural Implications of the Winter Olympics, 1924-2002" http://www.oermo.unito.it/web/Essex%20+%20

[2] The 1924 games, held before the IOC's decision, were awarded their Olympic status retroactively.

facilities without having to make major improvements in regional transportation systems or construct substantial new accommodations for athletes and spectators. At the same time, these communities benefitted because the Olympics significantly increased the host city's reputation as a center for winter tourism. For both St. Moritz (1928) and Lake Placid (1932), the games proved a significant catalyst to establishing them as centers for winter recreation.

After the tremendous increase in the popularity of winter sports in the 1950s and 60s, the scale of the games increased proportionally. With a substantial increase in athletes, spectators and the media, large urban areas proved more viable locations for the winter games. Not only did they have the resources to improve regional infrastructure and develop large-scale facilities and accommodations (so called Olympic villages), but they could also incorporate the improvements into long-term regional planning goals, such as urban renewal or economic stimulus. The Sarajevo games (1984), for example, were seen as an opportunity to modernize an aged city. Smaller cites and towns had difficulty justifying the large expense and were less likely to get a reasonable economic return from the large-scale facilities that they would need to build. Thus when the Olympics returned to Lake Placid in 1980, the "small town games" was an anachronism. The village's transportation and communication systems proved incapable of serving the burgeoning crowds and contemporary media, and the IOC pledged never to return to such a small venue.[3]

By the turn of the twenty-first century, the substantial increase in the scale of the events, the required financial backing, large-scale transportation system, sophisticated telecommunication facilities, and new priorities for sustainable development and environmental stewardship substantially precluded isolated locations from consideration to host the games. Today, it is highly unlikely that the kind of small and remote resort town represented by Lake Placid in 1932 would have the chance to host a winter Olympics.

[3]1980 Lake Placid Winter Games. http://www.sports-refernce.com/olympics/winter/1980/

Bobsledding

There are many theories about the origins of bobsledding as a sport; however, most sources credit the development of the bobsled to the Swiss, who began to affix runners and steering wheels to toboggans sometime between c1877 and the late 1890s. A bobsled club was formed at St. Moritz in 1896, and the first recorded bobsled competition was held there in 1898. While the earliest sleds were wood, these were soon replaced by steel, which allowed the sleds to achieve greater speed.[4] In addition, sleds began to be equipped with four runners on axels, which further increased the potential speed of the vehicles as they tore down the mountainsides. Safety concerns led to the development of an artificial bobsled run with a gentler slope, and the first one was built in St. Moritz in 1902. The sport quickly became popular in the Alpine countries, and by the time the first European championships were held in 1914, there were more than one hundred bobsled runs in Europe. In 1923 the International Federation for Bobsledding (FIBT) was established to set official rules for the sport, precipitating its inclusion in the 1924 Winter Olympics in Chamonix. Subsequently, bobsled competitions were held in every winter Olympics except for the 1964 games in Squaw Valley, California, where the organizing committee refused to build a run. Since the 1920s, only twelve bobsled runs have been officially approved for Olympic competition by the FIBT, and two of them are in the United States. These are the nominated track at Mt. Van Hoevenberg and a 1990 track at Bear Hollow, Utah, site of the 2002 games.

Mt. Van Hoevenberg Olympic Bobsled Run

The history of the Mt. Van Hoevenberg bobsled run is closely entwined with that of the Lake Placid Club, both because of Melvil Dewey's role in establishing winter recreation as an economic mainstay in the region and because it was his son, Godfrey Dewey, who almost singlehandedly brought the Olympics to Lake Placid. The younger Dewey (1890-1976), who took over management of the Lake Placid Club in the 1920s, was determined to expand the village's prestige with an invitation to host the international games. In order to accomplish this, he assumed management of the American ski team that traveled to St. Moritz for the 1928 Olympics. Dewey's

[4] Today's sleds are fiberglass.

goals were to tour top European winter resorts, to learn as much as he could about the Olympic games, and to lobby the IOC to bring the 1932 games to the Adirondacks. Once he had convinced the village of Lake Placid to support his efforts, he set out to persuade the IOC that Lake Placid could offer winter weather and sports facilities equal to those of the best European sites. Dewey was persuasive, and in 1929 the IOC announced, to the dismay of several other American competitors, that the III Winter Olympic Games would be held in Lake Placid in 1932. Dewey was then left to produce the sites, funds, and facilities to support his claim, and each of these posed difficulties.

The first issue was finding sites for the Olympic activities. In 1929 the *New York Times* reported that among the events "practically assured," were ski jumping, 18 and 50 kilometer ski races, ice hockey, speed skating, figure skating, and bobsled races.[5] Unlike well-established European resorts, Lake Placid had to construct facilities for almost all of these events. The bobsled run, in particular, was considered to be one of the most important of the promised facilities, and Dewey had promised the committee that if the games were awarded to Lake Placid, the village "would provide a bobsled run for the international competitions equal to any of the famous European slides."[6] Choosing a site for the run was more difficult than it appeared. Although mountains were plentiful, not all of them were accessible and some lacked the required steep slope. A number of sites were considered for the Olympic run, and several top choices emerged; however, none of them was acceptable to state authorities. The most desirable sites were on state-owned land that was protected ("forever wild") in the forest preserve. The Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks (APA) took no chances, suing the state to ensure that the run was not constructed on forest preserve land. The APA's claim that such development would be unconstitutional was upheld by the New York State Court of Appeals. Following the court's decision, Dewey selected another potential site on land held by the exclusionary Lake Placid Club. That site also proved problematic because the B'nai B'rith was prepared to attack the Lake Placid Club for its anti-Semitic

[5] "Facilities at Lake Placid," *New York Times*, 19 April 1929.
[6] George M. Lattimer, comp., *Official Report, III Olympic Winter Games, Lake Placid 1932* (n.p., n.d.), p. 157

membership if the bobsled run were constructed on the club's land. The problem was resolved when Dewey sold the site owned by the club to the town of North Elba. The latter immediately leased the site to New York State for ninety-nine years. Those involved with design and construction of the bob run agreed that the proposed site, which was located on the north slope of South Meadow Mountain, eight miles east of the village of Lake Placid, was the best available site in proximity to Lake Placid. South Meadow was subsequently renamed after Henry Van Hoevenberg (1849-1918), a legendary local resident.

The second issue, funding, was equally problematic. The timing of the Great Depression, which began in 1929, just after the Olympic proposal was approved, made development funds especially scarce. Nevertheless, Dewey was able to obtain the support of Gov. Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New York State Legislature. The state's initial funding, in February 1929, was allocated to support construction of the bobsled run, one of the most expensive facilities in the budget. The state made a second appropriation for bobsled construction at the end of that year. The state's commitment was crucial in convincing the village of Lake Placid to submit the bid, and it was also influential in persuading the IOC that Dewey could support his claims. Final costs for hosting the Olympics reached $1 million, an enormous amount to spend during the Depression, and construction of the bobsled run alone totaled nearly one-quarter of a million dollars. Much of the needed funds were raised by selling municipal bonds, mostly to well-off members of the Lake Placid Club. Dewey was an active force in the fundraising effort, and nearly $350,000 was raised in this manner. At the end of 1930, New York State created a State Olympic Winter Games Commission and appropriated $125,000 specifically for the bobsled run.

Finally, there was the issue of developing the facilities themselves. No one in America had ever built a bobsled run; however, Dewey found a course designer by hiring Stanislaus Zentzytzki, a German engineer and well-known bobsled run expert. Zentzytzki traveled to America in 1929 and 1930, surveying potential sites and taking the appropriate measurements. After the Mt. Van Hoevenberg site was identified, Zentzytzki returned to Europe to develop detailed plans. He also laid out a half-mile practice course on a site near the Intervale ski

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jump so that drivers could train and practice. Local contractors also used it to study the unfamiliar construction methods in advance of bidding on the actual Olympic facility.

When the Olympic site was approved in 1930, Zentzytzki was ready with detailed blueprints for the run, which was constructed by local carpenters under the supervision of the state conservation department. The $48,754.33 contract to build the run was awarded to Leo A. Malone of Lake Placid. An additional $10,714.50 was allocated for construction of an entrance road from NY 73. Henry Homburger, of the Saranac Lake engineering firm Smith, Golder and Homburger, was hired to oversee road layout and guide construction of the run using Zentzytzki's drawings. Work began on 4 August 1930, when workman began site clearing. The run was literally blasted and dug out of the mountain, with workers removing 27,374 cubic yards of earth and rock. The structure was completed in 148 days and opened to the public on Christmas Day, 1930.[7] The first world record was established at Mt. Van Hoevenberg on 7 February 1931, only a month after it opened, when the Saranac Lake Red Devils flashed down the mountain in one minute, fifty-two seconds. The bobsled was driven by Henry Homburg, the Saranac Lake engineer who had supervised the run's construction.

The American run far exceeded anything that had been built in Europe. At one and one-half miles, it was longer than European courses, while also being steeper, with a greater drop in grade. Its width ranged from six and one-half feet on the straight-aways to nearly twenty-two feet on the steepest grades, which were nearly perpendicular to the ground. While European courses were sometimes flatter at the curves, the Mt. Van Hoevenberg curves were steeper than its straight-aways. The course boasted a total of twenty-two curves, two of them hairpin turns. The structure was constructed of a combination of earth and stone, with the latter used to construct the steepest grades. The ice-covered surface, called "glare ice," was created from frozen snow and water, while a thin layer of snow was laid over the straight-aways to allow the sled runners to catch. The course was supported by an elaborate infrastructure. Eight thousand feet of pipe laid below ground carried water to a

[7] Lattimer, p. 162.

storage tank at the top, where it was sprayed over the run to create a fresh surface. The run required twenty thousand gallons of water each day to maintain the course for Olympic events.

A road was constructed parallel to the tracks to carry sleds and riders to the summit. Originally this task was accomplished using large open sleighs drawn by crawl driver tractors. Later, trucks replaced the tractors. Several buildings were constructed at specific points along the course to accommodate functions relative to competitive racing. These included small wood frame start huts at the summit, Whiteface curve, and the half-mile mark, a clubhouse at the finish line, and a sled shed at the end of the outrun. Buildings were simple wood structures, generally characterized by horizontal slab siding on walls and vertical board and batten in the gable ends. None of the 1930 buildings survive.

After experimenting in Europe with German-made sleds, the American Olympic team, whose members had never entered a bobsled competition, decided to design their own sleds. After some trials, Melville Dewey and George Edgley, of Lake Placid, came up with a radically new design. All European sleds were steered with ropes; however, the new American models were to be piloted with steering wheels, akin to those of an automobile. Initially, eight sleds holding eight persons and two sleds for two-person teams were ordered from A.G. Mason, of Peru, New York, who constructed them for $450 per sled. The Olympic committee also hired Donald Unger, a Swiss driver, to teach the novice Americans the art of "safe driving," which he undertook for the flat fee of $300. Unger later drove the sled for the Swiss team in the 1932 Winter Games.

Despite the novelty of bobsled racing in America, these competitions were among the most outstanding events of the 1932 Olympics. Two American teams won both the gold and silver medals in the four-person competition, and the United States also secured a gold medal in the two-person event. The Americans' dominance of the competition did not rest well with their European opponents. The latter, who had initially praised the run's design, construction and speed, quickly made it known that they were not happy with the

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world's only mile and one-half course. Two years later, after complaints about the safety of the longer run, the International Federation for Bobsledding established a one-mile distance as the standard for all future Olympic competitions. As a result, the upper half-mile of the Mt. Van Hoevenberg course was closed. Although the course has not been maintained and lacks an ice cover, the earth and stone structure of the upper run is intact and recent clearing has revealed the original prism.

Following the Olympics, maintenance and operation of the Mt. Van Hoevenberg run was turned over to the New York State Conservation Department. The maintained section of the bobsled run was kept open during the winter for public use as well as some national and international competitions. It was also open in the summer, when visitors had the opportunity to walk the course. In a larger context, Dewey's efforts were extremely influential. Bobsledding, previously unknown in America, captivated the country's interest, and U.S. teams dominated the sport until 1956. Lake Placid became a popular venue for professional sporting events, and the bobsled run, the only one in North America until the 1990s, drew athletes from all over the world for training and competition.

1980 Olympics

Lake Placid was awarded a second opportunity to host the Winter Olympics in 1980. Unease over the problems experienced by host cities chosen for the 1968 and 1976 games had substantially eliminated the competition, leaving Lake Placid as the only city that submitted a bid for the 1980 games.[8] Lake Placid, which already had a reputation for its Olympics-worthy sports facilities, promised to hold a simpler Olympics, with a minimum of expense. Lake Placid's selection was probably bolstered by its success in hosting the 1961, 1969, 1973 and 1978 World Bobsled Championships. Nevertheless, despite its more than adequate sports facilities, the

[8] The 1968 games at Grenoble, France, were widely criticized because of the great distance between events, necessitating construction of three separate Olympic villages at different locations. Only two events were actually held at Grenoble. In 1972, Denver backed out from its commitment to host the 1976 Olympics after citizens baulked at the excessive costs and the potential for negative environmental impacts.

community was overwhelmed by crowds and its transportation and accommodation facilities proved insufficient, precipitating the IOC's decision to avoid small venues for future games.

By this time, luge sliding had been added to Olympic competition. For this event, riders lay prone on small sleds in a face up position. The original Mt. Van Hoevenberg bobsled run was not suitable for the luge, and although the IOC mandated that a combination track be used for all Olympic bobsled and luge events, the committee supported Lake Placid's decision to construct a separate luge track. This decision was fortuitous, in that it allowed preservation of the historic 1932 bobsled run. Construction of the new luge run began in the fall of 1977 and was completed in February 1979. The luge run, which was designed by Jan Steler, a French engineer, was built on the north slope of Mt. Van Hoevenberg, nearly parallel to the mile-long maintained section of the bobsled run. The course was both refrigerated and lighted, the latter to accommodate the requirement that one run be completed at night.[9]

At the same time, the bobsled track was updated to provide access to a new 1980 start hut, and a new service road was built to facilitate the transportation of sleds and maintenance.[10] A one-mile section to be used in competition was refrigerated in order to reduce the risks of delays in warm weather. This change was studied and approved in advance by the FIBT. Work began in September 1978 and was completed in February 1979. The contract was awarded to the engineering firm Sargent, Webster, Crenshaw and Foley, which did the work under the supervision of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. A common refrigeration plant was constructed adjacent to the bobsled and luge tracks so that one system could serve both facilities. Thirty-three miles of one and one-quarter inch black iron pipe was embedded in a new concrete surface to carry the refrigerated brine the full length of the bobsled run. No other changes were made to the track, and its original water system continued to be used to refresh the ice cover. Although the competition

[9] *Final Report, XIII Olympic Winter Games, Lake Placid, N.Y., February, 1980,* p., 64-67.
[10] *Final Report,1980,* p 59-63.

track was not altered substantially, most of the other buildings and structures surviving from the bobsled run's early period were replaced between 1960 and 1980. New buildings were constructed for the clubhouse, sled storage shed, and start houses; new bleachers and lighting were installed, and other small site improvements were made.

Bobsledding was an important component of the 1980 games, with new records established by German and Swiss teams and more than 39,000 people viewing the two-man and four-man competitions. The total attendance was the largest group ever to watch bobsledding in North America to that date.[11] Nevertheless, the competition did not achieve the level of fame accorded the historic 1932 Olympic bobsled event. In 1932 the bobsled races had been among the most exciting and newsworthy events of the winter games. They are noted in nearly every history of the Olympics, and they were recorded in numerous historic photos. The novelty of the sport in America, the sophisticated and challenging course, and the success of the American team all had a significant influence on the development of American sports in the following decades.

Historic records of the 1980 winter games, however, focus on speed skating and hockey. American Eric Heiden made history by winning a record five gold medals in skating competition, and, perhaps more memorable, 1980 was the year in which the United States hockey team, largely made up of students and amateurs, defeated the heavily favored Soviet Union national team before going on to win the gold medal a few days later. The victory, which has been immortalized as the "Miracle on Ice," is considered among the greatest in the history of American sports. Nearly all historic accounts and photos of the 1980 games located to date favor the ice skating and hockey competitions. For these reasons, the 1980 Olympic Bobsled Competition is not considered to be an event of exceptional significance, and the features at the nominated site that represent this event are considered

[11] *Final Report, 1980*, p 63.

non-historic at this time. However, 1980 Winter Olympics was certainly a significant event in Lake Placid's history, and these features should be reevaluated in the local context when they reach fifty years of age.

Post-Olympics

In the next decade, the 1980 luge track was subject to structural problems caused by frost heaves. At the same time, bobsled design was modernized so that new sleds achieved faster speeds, rendering the 1930 track more dangerous. In 1999 these problems were addressed when a new combined bob and luge run replaced the 1980 luge track. The new run is refrigerated, lighted, and equipped with covering, all of which make it more versatile and functional. Unfortunately, construction of the new run necessitated the removal of approximately six hundred feet of original bobsled track, including Whiteface curve. While the new track accommodates professional competition, the maintained portion of the 1930 bobsled run was preserved and adapted for public use. The public course includes only the lowest half-mile of the run; however, the retired half-mile section above it is maintained and retains integrity to its 1980 condition.

Integrity

Although the 1930 bobsled run has been adapted over time to serve new functions, the nominated structure retains the integrity of its association with the 1932 Olympics, as well as location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, and feeling. The site is completely surrounded with forested land and entered via the original (altered) access road. With the exception of the area around Whiteface curve, the original earth and stone structure retains its length, width, grade, alignment, and form. With the exception of an ice cover, the section above Whiteface curve retains its structural design and materials. Once abandoned, it has recently been cleared, and, if desired, it could by rehabilitated and returned to service. Below Whiteface, the only change is an added layer of reinforced concrete (to accommodate the refrigeration system), which has not compromised any of the original features. Although the loss of Whiteface curve is significant in interrupting the original run, the lost section equals only 8 percent of the original track. The original steep topography of the course survives, as does

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its serpentine path and all but one of its original twenty-two curves. The latter features are essential to understanding the events of 1932. In addition, the structural and mechanical features that supported the run's function survive both above and below Whiteface. A few features that illustrate the structure's original operation also survive, including the water tank and a fragment of the original starting platform. The circulation system is substantially intact, including the road built to tow sleds back to the summit, the pedestrian path, the outrun, and a small side track for training.

While none of the original buildings survive, the newer buildings, such as the clubhouse, sled barn, and start houses, accommodate the same functions. Because of this, they do not compromise the integrity of setting. Furthermore, most of the new buildings were constructed or used for the 1980 Olympics, which, while not of exceptional significance, was an important event in local history. The largest and most significant addition to the site is the adjacent luge and bobsled track constructed in 1999. This structure is also compatible with the original run because it represents a continuation of the original function using an improved design, contemporary size, and updated technology.

Conclusion

The Mt. Van Hoevenberg bobsled run has become famous, attracting visitors from all over the world. It recalls an important theme in the Adirondack region's history, that of adapting the landscape to enable a daring, recreational use of the mountains. The story of the 1932 Olympics also exemplifies the efforts of local citizens to capitalize on the region's grandeur in order to promote economic development. As a rare surviving example of a bobsled run from this early era, the structure provides information about the early design and development of bobsled runs in the United States. It stands out within this context as the first of its kind built in America, the only one of its size ever constructed and used in an Olympic event, and one of only twelve bobsled runs in the world that were approved by the sport's governing body.

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UTM References - All Zone 18

1. 586162/4896566
2. 585922/4896667
3. 585586/4896417
4. 585873/4896210
5. 585819/4896128
6. 585958/4896079
7. 585386/4895994
8. 585564/4895932
9. 585362/4896512
10. 585558/4896457
11. 585976/4896702

Verbal Boundary Description
The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the enclosed map with scale.

Boundary Justification
The boundary was drawn to include the intact features of the site associated with the 1932 Olympics. Because the bobsled run is now located within a large contemporary sports complex, the boundary takes in only the bobsled run itself and its adjacent access road. This includes the entire original run and road with the exception of a six hundred foot section of track and road that was destroyed in the 1990s. Because of this interruption, the nomination includes two separate parcels. The nomination also excludes all adjacent buildings and structures, which were constructed after the period of significance, the adjacent 1990s combined bobsled and luge track, and the entrance road and parking lot, which have been enlarged and altered.

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 11 Page 1

Preliminary research and documentation provided by:

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☐ See continuation sheet

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number photos Page 1

Photographer: Lynn Garofalini
New York SHPO
PO Box 189
Waterford, NY 12188

Date: December 2007

Tiff Files: CD-R of .tiff files on file at
National Park Service
Washington DC

and

New York SHPO
PO Box 189
Waterford, NY 12188

Photo List:

1. abandoned section: original water tank
2. abandoned section: original curve 1
3. lower section: curve 1
4. lower section: Cliffside curve
5. lower section: Shady Corner curve
6. lower section: curve 7
7. lower section: Zag curve
8. lower section: finish curve
9. lower section: cross ramp finish
10. lower section: sled shed breaking hill

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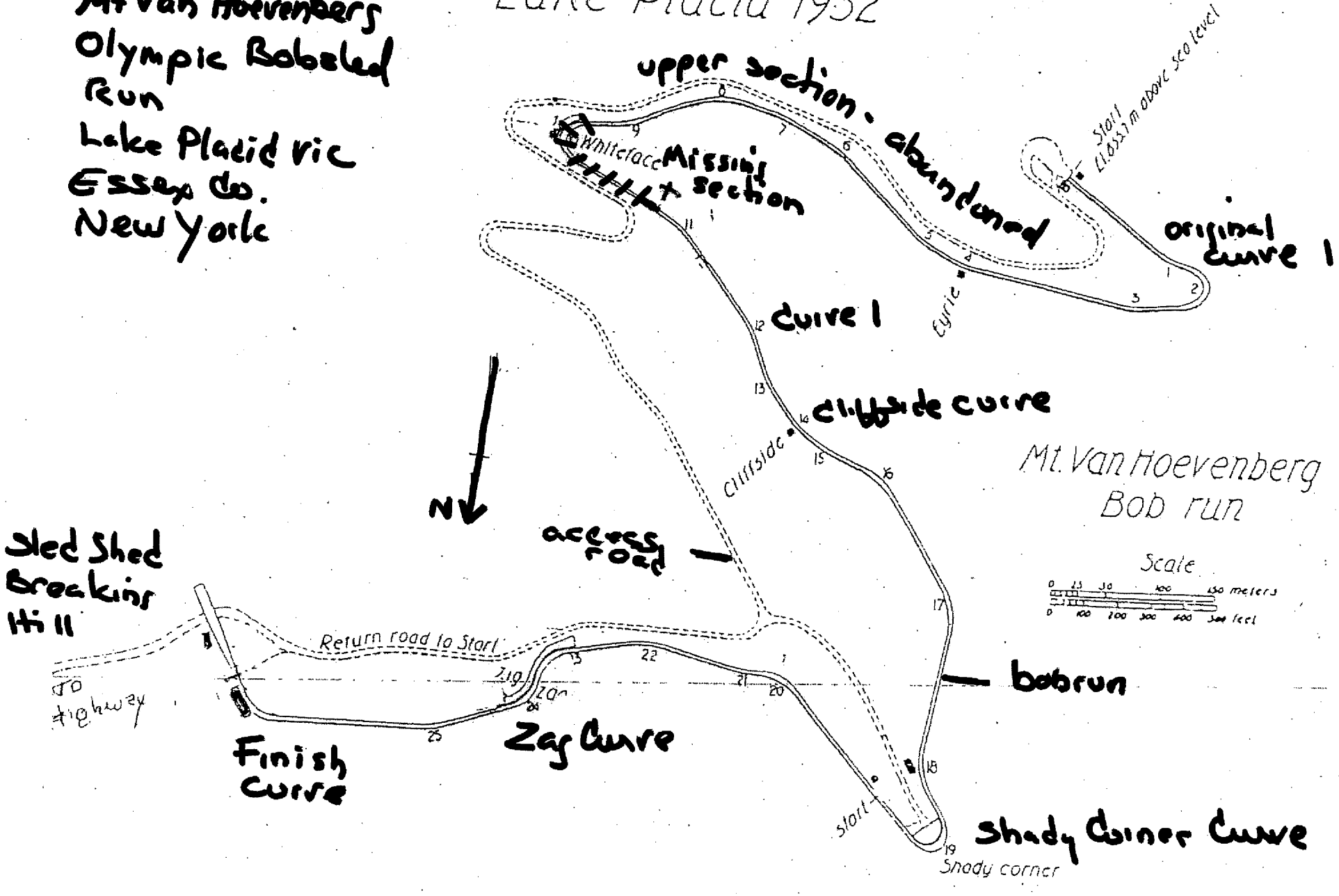
III Olympic Winter Games
Lake Placid 1932

Mt van Hoevenberg
Olympic Bobsled
Run
Lake Placid Vic
Essex Co.
New York



UTM Reference Point	Easting	Northing
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8	585564	4895932
9	585362	4896512
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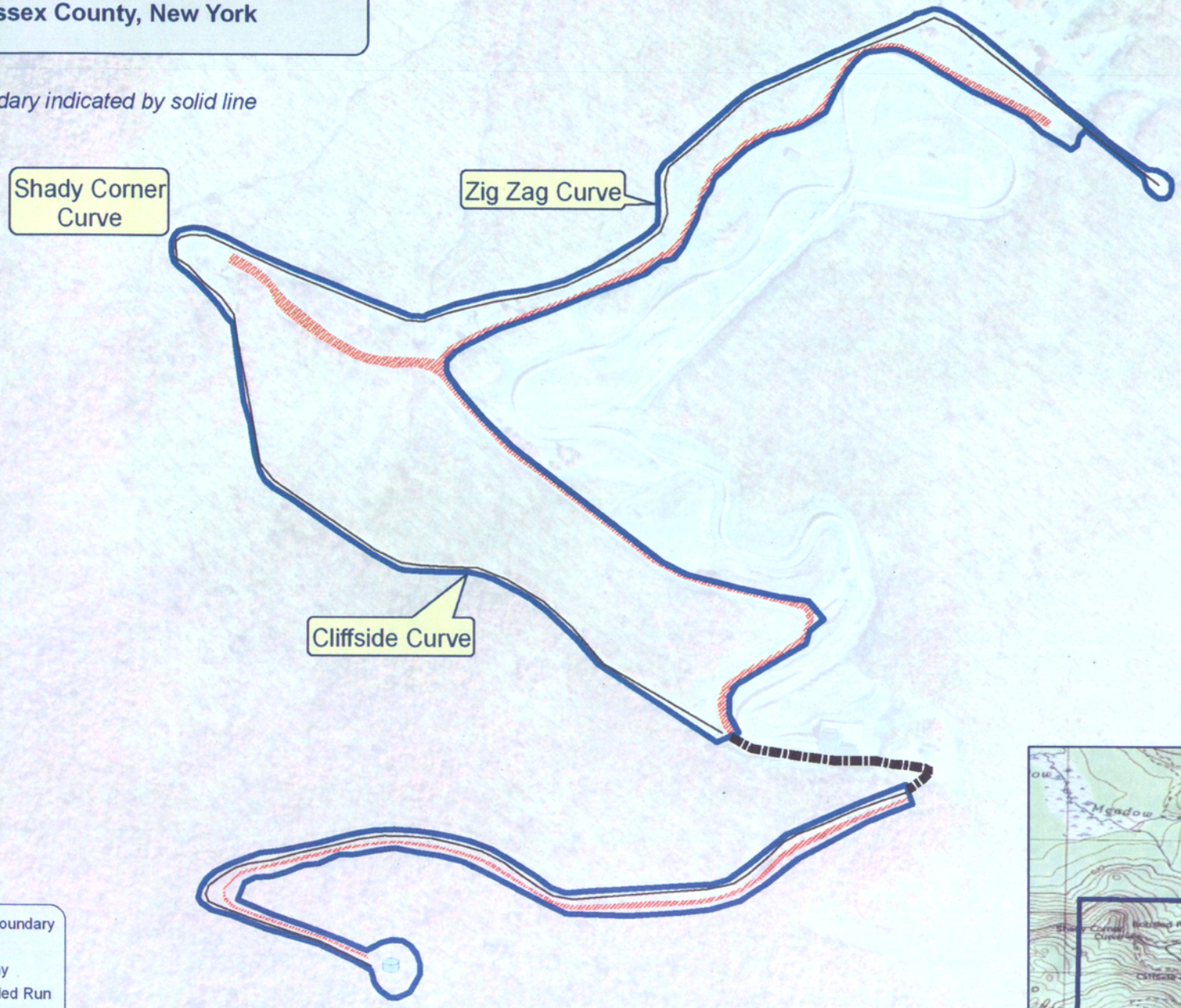
Mt. Van Hoevenberg Olympic Bobsled Run
Lake Placid Vicinity
Essex County, New York

Boundary indicated by solid line



Nomination Boundary
1932 Run
1932 Roadway
Missing Bobsled Run
Original Watertank

1:4,612

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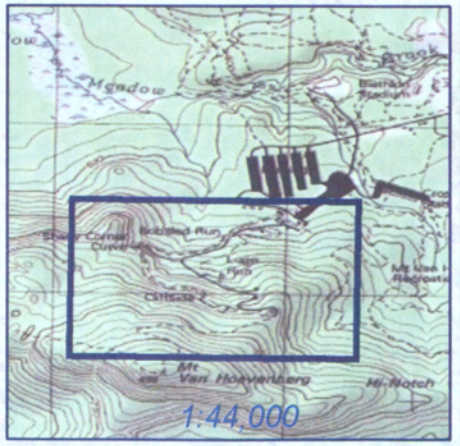

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number add. images Page 1

abandoned section: service road

abandoned section: retaining wall for service road

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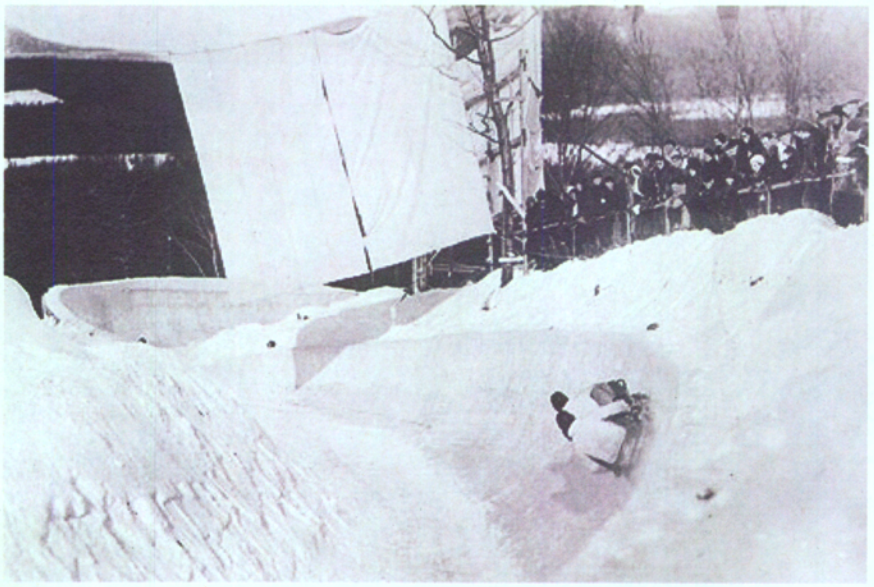
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number add. images Page 2



Historic view: 1932

Historic view: 1932

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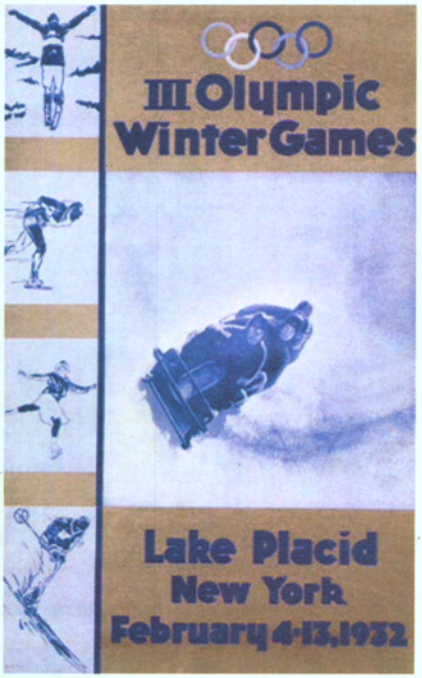
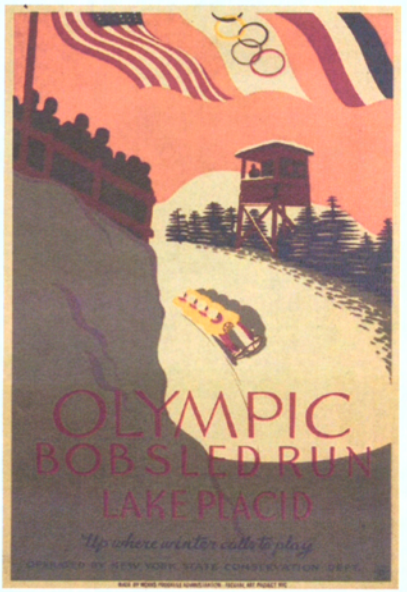


Brochure for 1932 Olympics



WPA Poster for 1932 Olympics

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Sled Time
0:43.20
Lake Placid
Sports Complex
Coca-Cola
Kodak
FINISH


MT. VAN HOEVENBERG
OLYMPIC BOBSLED RUN