

## James Winston (Jim) McConkey

Inducted CSHF: 2001

Hometown: Barrie, ON / Whistler, BC

Date of Birth: June 12, 1926

Affiliated Discipline(s): Coach, Industry, Instructor

Active Career Date(s): 1945 - 1985

FIS Code: n/a

Club: Barrie Ski Club,

Jim McConkey was once described by the legendary Austrian skier, Ernst Hinterseer, as the "Best all-round skier in the world". There is no doubt that he was one of the first of the "extreme skiers" honing his considerable skills in the 1960s.

Born in 1926, he first experienced skiing when he strapped on, as he recalls, "very short skis with only toe straps " to slide down a small hill in front of the family home in Barrie, Ontario. He went on to become one of the most famous of the so-called "powder hounds" for his superb deep powder snow technique. 'McConk' as he was affectionately known preferred what was then the strictly unconventional. His "gelandi jumping" and acrobatics on skis were the precursors to free-style aerials and the free-style movement generally. He sought out and reveled in difficult snow conditions, broken crust, ice and the infamous "mashed potatoes" conditions in order to improve his skills. Thought to be nearly impossible to ski, he was the first to conquer the gullies at both Alta and Snowbird.

But he was much more than just a great skier. In 1945 he received his Assistant Ski Instructor designation after attending a Canadian Ski Instructors' Alliance (CSIA) school in North Bay, Ontario, under Examiner Clint Melville. A year later he received his certification as a Ski Instructor under Chief Examiner Luggi Foegger at Lac Beauport, Quebec. From 1946 until 1949 he taught at the Snow Eagle Ski School at Gray Rocks Inn, St Jovite, Quebec. It was during this time, in the spring of 1948, that he joined Luggi Foegger to film on the Athabasca Glacier, Alberta a project that lasted 3-months. It was also memorable for an incident on his 22nd birthday that almost cost him his life. He fell into a crevasse on the Columbia Ice Field breaking several bones in the process. It was another famous Austrian skier, Toni Matt, who was lowered into the crevasse to rescue the badly injured McConkey.

Following his recovery and a stint working on the construction on the first chair lift at Mt Norquay, Banff, Alberta, McConkey went with Luggi Foegger in the winter of 1948-49 to Yosemite, California, to teach at Badger Pass. In 1951, he returned to Banff to manage the marketing and publicity for Mount Norquay, Banff. He remained there until the fall of 1952 when he returned to the Gray Rocks Snow Eagle ski school as a senior instructor with Real Charette.

In the fall of 1953, he moved to Salt Lake City, Utah, where he taught for Alf Engen's ski school at Alta, Utah, staying there for almost 10-years. He skied in several films, and did numerous picture assignments with photographer, Fred Lindholm, for Ski publications. Alta's 'McConkey Bowl' is named for him. He also skied and filmed every spring with Canadian legend, Hans Gmoser, founder and pioneer of helicopter skiing in western Canada.

In 1961 and 1962, he taught for Junior Bonnous at the Sugar Bowl, California, ski school and did some ski racing on the International Professional Ski Racers Association (IPSRA) circuit, returning to Alta to work at the Gold Miner's Daughter Lodge where he managed the ski shop and taught private lessons for the Alf Engen Ski School.

In 1963-1964, he directed the ski school at Park City, Utah, but soon felt a need to control his own destiny, "Since I was a fairly good salesman I wanted my own ski shop and rentals and ski school". He moved to Todd Mountain (now Sun Peaks), Kamloops, British Columbia, where he spent the next 4-years operating the ski school and ski shop and working as a guest Coach at the Franz Gabl Mount Baker Summer Racing School.

In the meantime, Whistler Mountain was undergoing substantial expansion and in 1968 he was approached to operate the ski school (becoming CSIA Examiner for western Canada), ski and rental shops and helicopter skiing operations. Whistler bought back the ski school operation in 1980 but he continued to operate the ski and rental shops until the end of 1985 when Whistler again offered to buy the business. He continued to work for the Whistler operation in a public relations capacity for the stores and their customers as well as opening the Japanese market.

*Please Note: The ski information gathered here is compiled from a number of sources; it may not be inclusive of all accomplishments.*

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