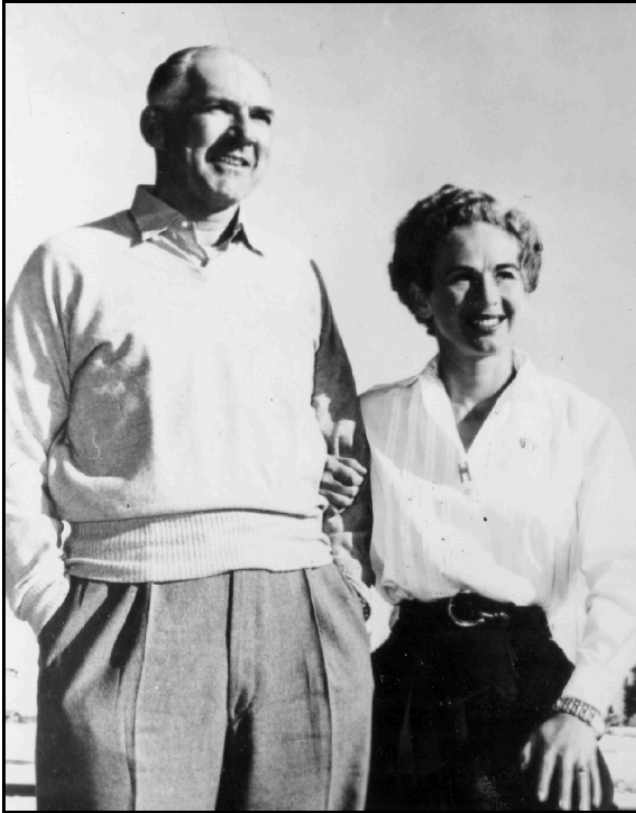


#127

Donald Fraser

Born: 1913 Died: 1994



Donald & Gretchen Fraser

Donald Fraser was a pioneer alpine skier from the far northwest at a time when nearly all skiing was either jumping or cross-country. He became intrigued with the idea that skis could be directed by skiers to go pretty much where they wanted them to go.

Donald became one of the very first skiers in the Northwest corner of the United States to popularize and become proficient at downhill and slalom skiing.

Few could even spell slalom when he started winning. He won the first slalom ever staged by the Pacific Northwest Ski Association in 1933. In 1934, with an American-style all-at-once start, he won the inaugural event in the incredibly rugged Silver Skis Downhill in a field of 67 contestants in which about one-half finished.

The race started at 10,000 feet on the south slope of Mt. Rainier and simply went down, down, down.

Fraser was a leader in alpine skiing techniques and won his first Pacific Northwest Combined Championship in 1935, the climax of a series of important wins throughout the Northwest. This led to his selection on the 1936 Olympic and F.I.S. teams.

At Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, a hip injury prevented Olympic competition, but a week or so later he came off the injury list to substitute for U.S. teammate Darroch Crookes in the F.I.S. slalom at Innsbruck, finishing 12th.

Fraser, Crookes and teammate Dick Durrance were invited to the famed Marmolata downhill in Italy, but an avalanche forced cancellation of the race, so the trio went on to the King's Cup at Sestriere, a series of six downhill races, wondrously long, difficult and ungroomed. Fraser finished 11th across the series.

His next winter season was perhaps his finest in competition. He won the Northwest Alpine Combined for the third time and was named a member of the U.S. team to the Pan American championships in Chile. There he won the slalom, finished fifth in downhill and second in combined against many of the world's best. This came at a time when U.S. contestants were generally regarded as unworthy of international recognition.

Don, with his gray, whipcord downhill pants becoming a trademark, won another PNSA championship in 1938 and climaxed this season with a second victory in the now gate-controlled but wildly-fast, Silver Skis. In so doing, he outclassed the "Wild Man of the Downhill" Hannes Schroll of Austria.

He was, quite naturally, an automatic choice for the 1940 Olympic team, but these Games never came off, thwarted by the early rumblings of World War II.

His early accomplishments are the reasons for his Hall of Fame credentials, but the fact that Don Fraser devoted himself to skiing – as a pioneer alpine skier, a strong competitor and an active ski official (Course Setter, Chief of Course for 1941 Nationals at Aspen to mention just one) have made him one of U.S. skiing's No. 1 citizens.

So, is it any wonder that his wife, Gretchen Kunigk Fraser, became America's first Olympic Gold Medal winner and a Hall of Fame member herself in the period that followed his illustrious competitive years?

Don Fraser set a good track to follow.?

Donald Fraser was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1972.