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Hans Strand

Born: 1905 Died: 1987

Hans Strand's trophy room was impressively filled with trophies, medals and countless photos of his era, many of them showing him with jumping friends and companions. Among the photos were many of Kyrre and his brother Torger Tokle who were no strangers to either Strand or Bear Mountain.

Hans Strand was born in Melbu, Norway, in 1905. Immigrating to the United States in 1925, he lost no time in seeking out the Norwegian – American Ski Club of Rockford, Illinois. At the age of 10, he demonstrated his skills by winning his first tournament in Norway, and these skills were quickly born out.

As a Class “B” jumper, he completely outstripped all the Class “A” competitors at a meet held in 1928 at the Racine, Wisconsin, hill and at the same time established a hill record.

During the next five years, the necessities of living saw him at various jobs until he finally settled at working in the inn at Bear Mountain State Park in New York where he remained until his retirement in 1973.

It was only logical he should join the Bear Mountain Sports Association and his memories of meets include the hills at Racine, Oconnowac, and Westby in Wisconsin; Ogdon Dunes in Indiana; Fox River Grove, Illinois; and Red Wing, Duluth, and Minneapolis, Minnesota. During the mid-thirties and early forties he was no stranger to Lake Placid, Berlin, N.H.; Brattleboro, Vermont, Salisbury Mills, Rosendale in New York and of course, his beloved Bear Mountain.

Perhaps his greatest day was that day in 1942 when he managed to win the Senior Men's Jumping Championship at Berlin, New Hampshire, on that formidable hill. The following year he captured the Eastern Veterans' Championship and also the New York State Vet's Championship.

His contributions to skiing lay in other areas also. His close proximity to officialdom at Bear Mt. State Park aided jumping's cause. In the nearly snowless winter of 1950, the F.I.S. Championships were held in Lake Placid and one of the warm-up jumps was scheduled for Salisbury, Connecticut, which was suffering from lack of snow. The industrious citizens of Salisbury covered the hill with chipped ice and the meet went off as scheduled. Strand noted this and was among those who helped, selling the idea to Bear Mountain to buy 120 tons of chipped ice in order to guarantee a jumping schedule as planned. Among the reasons cited for the venture was that the New York City press could depend on a meet – snow or no – and so could the jumpers and viewing spectators many of whom had to come long distances. The idea proved both feasible and acceptable, and to this day Bear Mt.'s Jumping Schedule goes off snow or no.

During the dark days of WW II, Strand was among those who pleaded with success for the State Park to keep ski jumping on its agenda of activities when many other hills in the east failed either due to gas rationing or the money to keep them going. Those who fell to the scythe of misfortune included Salisbury Mills, Rosendale, White Plains all in New York and Green Hill in Massachusetts.

During those bleak weekends in the great depression, Strand and two others sent many a crowd home talking of “the triple jump.” On one such occasion it was fashioned by Strand taking the lead point in an inverted V at the top of the in-run. Stretching both arms back, he would hold the hand of Carl Holmstrom on his right and Nick Nylund on his left. Together they'd start down the in-run of the 50 meter hill and all hit the take off with precise timing and be airborne toward the landing hill. Dorothy Graves, the intrepid lady ski jumper from Lake Placid was excited enough to want to join in. Strand thought enough of her ability that he let her take the point with Kenneth Suhl holding her left outstretched arm and Strand her right.

However, a day comes when the muscles don't respond, but Strand had no regrets in his golden years. He could look back at the time he was qualified for the tryouts in the '32 Olympics only to be knocked out by an injury. Strand could also look back on the early training he provided for Alf Vincelette of nearby Highland Falls, New York, who did make the U.S. F.I.S. and Olympic Team.

Hans Strand was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1975.



Hans Strand, Racine, Wisconsin, 1928