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Barbara Kidder-Lee

Born: 1927 Died: 1996

On an outing, Barbara Kidder met a fellow skier who talked about his love for the mountains and the winter sport of skiing. This "Johnny Apple Seed" of the mountains reached Barbara in a peculiar but meaningful way. He referred to skiing as "a way of life." Barbara was later to learn who Otto Schniebs (NSHF, 1967) was. She never forgot his words, and she credits him along with her father, for her lifetime skiing philosophy. Otto took the Kidder family skiing that winter, where he taught them the proper way to turn their skis.



Barbara Kidder was born in Berkeley, California, on March 2, 1927. Her family moved to Denver, Colorado, in 1935, when she was eight years old. That same year Mr. Kidder made skis for Barbara, her two brothers, and sister. Everyone in the family enjoyed their weekend to the mountains – except Barbara! Barbara chose to remain in the car where she wouldn't have to face the cold and a sport she considered to be "not fun at all."

The following year Barbara was coaxed to try the unstable boards, which appeared to be entirely too awkward and slippery. Almost immediately, however, she felt the exhilaration of the sport, and from that day on, Barbara looked to the mountains for her challenge with the snow.

Her father, who had lost a leg when he was seven years old, also started skiing that first year in the Rockies. Being an engineer by profession, his mind tackled this problem with the same sense of challenge he imparted to his children. He mounted baskets on the ends of his crutches and used them for added support.

During the summer of 1937, the Kidders enjoyed the mountains hiking and camping. At eleven years of age, Barbara, along with her father, had unofficially climbed more peaks above 14,000 feet than any other person her age. Ski lifts had not become ubiquitous in the Rockies as they are today, and so Barbara did a great deal of cross-country and "uphill" skiing along with her downhill. As the weekends in the Rockies began to string together, Mr. Kidder found a need to purchase a cabin in the mountains, which the family skied into during the winters.

In order to improve the skiing skill of the Kidder family, Mr. Kidder cut fir tree bows and placed them on the snow, simulating slalom courses. Barbara progressed rapidly, and without hesitation decided to enter her first race during the winter of 1940. It was the same year she won her first slalom, and the entire family suddenly found themselves caught up in the sport of ski racing.

In 1941, fourteen-year-old Barbara qualified to race in the national championship slalom and downhill races at Aspen, Colorado. She finished 9th and 7th respectively.

Barbara made friends with R. Barney McLean (NSHF, 1959) and Gordon Wren (NSHF, 1958), who helped her immensely in the years to follow.

From 1942 to 1945, Barbara had to confine her racing to locally sanctioned races, until World War II ended. In 1945, she entered the Alta Snow Cup Combined. The favorites were the famed Canadian Wurtele twins (NSHF, 1969) and Paula Kann (NSHF, 1970) of New Hampshire. The surprise winner was the unknown Barbara Kidder! That same winter, the spunky, blue-eyed blond traveled to Lake Placid, New York, to again test her skill against the best, at the Kate Smith International Team Trophy Race. She felt a little uneasy on the hard prepared course, but none the less, won an impressive 2nd place combined award.

Barbara was now someone to look for on the results of races around the country. The "Darling of the Rockies" was on her way.

The next year, 1946, Barbara won the first Roach Cup in Aspen, Colorado, and the National Intercollegiate Championships at Sun Valley, Idaho. She skied in that competition for Denver University.

She then headed South to compete for the second time in the nationally sanctioned Alta Snow Cup Combined. As in New York, she allowed only one Wurtele sister to pass her.

The remaining nationally sanctioned race for her, that year, was the Alpine Championships in Franconia, New Hampshire. Her 2nd place finish behind the Canadian Wurtele in the combined, distinguished nineteen year old Barbara Kidder as our nation's premier women skier for 1946.

Barbara and her family could never think of living anywhere but in the mountains. She resided in Reno, Nevada, and skied the Sierras with her youngest daughter. She was truly a champion!

Barbara Kidder-Lee was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1977.