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Jerry Nunn

Born: 1922

Information taken from a nomination letter to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame – Sponsor: Doug Pfeiffer

Jerry Nunn was an outstanding pioneer ski patroller and the first woman U.S. Forest Service Avalanche Ranger. She played a major role in the success of the current Avalauncher avalanche control system. A slip of a woman at five-foot-five and 120 pounds, she looked right at home modeling for Joseph Magnin in Tahoe, but that was only one of her worlds.

Born March 12, 1922, Jerry Nunn mastered an early rope tow at Soda Springs in the northern Sierra's Donner Pass Ski Area and at 18 was assisting the area's regular emergency physician Dr. Ralph Reynolds in the Ski Patrol room. She joined the National Ski Patrol System when it came to the Far West in 1944, already a four-season veteran in first aid. In 1949, she joined the Ski Patrol at Sugar Bowl and in 1954 applied for the patrol at Squaw Valley, where

she was accepted after demonstrating her ability to control a toboggan solo, without a second person braking. She then volunteered for Squaw's elite dynamite crew, the one that took out snowy-filled cornices.

In 1957, she applied for the Intermountain Forest Service Snow Ranger certification course in Utah – the Forest Service had no idea "Jerry" was female. She threatened a lawsuit unless she was admitted and then aced the course to become the first accredited woman Forest Service Snow Ranger.

Since she was now the only woman certified Snow Ranger in the Far West, Nunn gave numbers of avalanche-control courses to all-male classes and became the first woman district National Avalanche Patrol leader. In 1959, she was picked as one of 60 patrollers for the 1960 Squaw Olympic patrol under Monty Atwater, the leading U.S. avalanche control expert.

In 1966, Jerry partnered with Atwater to develop his radical Avalauncher, a gas-powered gun capable of thrusting four-pound canisters of explosives a mile to set off avalanches before they came down on skiers. She went on the road to demonstrate the Avalauncher, toting live canisters around in the back of her car. After Atwater fell too ill to carry on, Nunn continued on the road selling Avalaunchers at considerable personal risk.. Finally, the Avalauncher caught on and the firm became successful. She had rescued a valuable avalanche control tool through her own considerable dedication. The Avalauncher-type gas gun is standard avalanche control armament around the ski world today, so it is fair to say a great number of skiers in high-mountain resorts owe Jerry Nunn, if not for their lives then for some very good powder skiing.

Jerry Nunn was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 2003.



Jerry Nunn, Mt. Bachelor, Oregon, March 2003