



#55

Otto Schniebs

Born: 1892 Died: 1973

Often considered the “Dean of American Ski Pioneers,” Otto Schniebs was the author of several books on skiing, of which Modern Ski Technique, written in collaboration with John McCrillis, is the best-known. His main claim to fame, however, is as a ski coach.

Otto Schniebs was born in 1892 and resided in Wilmington, New York. He is credited with saying “Skiing is not just a sport; it is a way of life.”

Under Otto's encouragement, the Mount Greylock Ski Club was responsible for much of the early ski development in the Berkshire Mountains of Massachusetts. It helped layout the Thunderbolt Racing Trail on Mount Greylock, where it sponsored the first downhill race in the state in 1935. The winner was Otto's Dartmouth College “Freshman Sensation,” Dick Durrance.

Otto learned to ski in his native Germany at the age of three. During World War I, he hauled machine guns around the Carpathian Mountains. “And that's not exactly sport.” He came here in 1927 “to become a free man” and “escape the colossal stupidity of war.”

Otto's Alpine Ski School, among the earliest in America, was held in West Newton and Boston in the winter of 1927-1928. Lessons cost 50 cents for two hours. He also taught and lectured throughout the area. In 1930, Otto was hired by Dartmouth College where, besides his work as a technician, he coached the Dartmouth varsity and “B” Ski Teams, speed skating, figure skating, and snowshoeing. Dartmouth's Jack Shea won two gold medals in the 1932 Olympic speed skating competition. Otto wrote his first instruction book in 1931, followed by others. He noted that most modern books are too technical. “A beginner, unless he is a mathematician, can't understand them.”

Otto stayed on at Dartmouth until 1936, when he moved to Lake Placid, New York, and supposedly retired from college coaching. In 1941, however, his daughter Elvira persuaded him to become ski coach at St. Lawrence University, where she was matriculating. Schniebs stayed until 1956, when he retired definitively from coaching. Everyone exposed to his charm will agree that Otto was a super salesman for the sport of skiing.

In 1963, he received the first safety trophy awarded by the United States Eastern Amateur Ski Association, the New England Council Silver Bowl, “for stimulating more interest in skiing than any other person in the country.” A monument on Schniebs Pass in Aspen, Colorado, stands just a few yards from the spot where he predicted, in the 1930s, that a large ski resort would rise some day.

As a coach, Otto Schniebs placed nine men on one Olympic team and seven on another. He skied with Gretchen Fraser, the first American to win an Olympic gold medal in skiing, in 1948. Otto received letters of admiration and congratulations from all over the United States, including the White House. The signatures include those of Sherman Adams, Dick Durrance, Sel Hannah, Roland Palmedo, Lowell Thomas, and many others. Schniebs also is listed in the 1966 issue of *Who's Who in America*.

Otto made an indelible mark on skiing in America by coaching many of America's finest skiers and bringing out their potential. His record of achievements speaks for itself.

Otto Schniebs was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1967.



Otto Schniebs skiing with his granddaughter.