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Dr. Harold C. Bradley

Born: 1879 Died: ?

Dr. Harold C. Bradley first became enamored with skiing when he witnessed his first ski jumping tournament, felt the urge to climb the scaffold, and try it himself.

Something of the danger which clings to hill tops must have fascinated Dr. Harold C. Bradley, “grand old man” of American skiing. His ski sports service and mountain daring are legendary. There’s no doubt that the spirit of the Vikings lived within the breast of Doc. His only regret was that he had to give up skiing when he reached 85.

Never a true alpine expert, Bradley first became enamored of skiing as a new resident of Wisconsin from California. This love began while watching Norwegians in a thrilling jumping exhibition, an art he felt impelled to try. But Doc Bradley, then a young chemistry professor at the University of Wisconsin medical school in Madison, discovered that jumpers are not made at 28 years of age.

Bradley vividly recalls:

“A special train took quite a crowd to this show and I was astounded and inspired by the thrilling beauty of what appeared to be certain suicide. I fell so deeply in love with skiing at the late age of 28 that I was determined, when I got married two years later, that if we did have children, they should be introduced to skiing very early – say 3 years old. And that was our program, and we really stuck to it.”

Seven boys and a daughter came along.

The sons became famous: Charles, as a jumper and 10th Mountain Trooper; Harold, Jr., a ski jumping dropout who climbs mountains; David, onetime national four-way champion who managed the 1960 Olympic team in Squaw Valley; Steve, four-event skier and manager of Colorado’s Winter Park; Joseph, a devoted ski fan; Richard, onetime four-way skier and skiing mountaineer, and William, all-around skier and 10th Mountain Trooper.

The daughter, Mary Cornelia, died at 7 years and subsequently was memorialized with a trophy to complement Averell Harriman’s establishment of the Bradley Plate as a four-event individual championship at Sun Valley. The respective winners were Kathleen Harriman and Steve Bradley.

Mr. and Mrs. Bradley also established the Paul Bietila Memorial Trophy for the National Ski Association in 1940. Paul, a member of the “Flying Bietilas” of Ishpeming, Michigan, died following a ski jumping accident. At the time he was an athlete protégé of the Bradleys, who sponsored him as a student at the University of Wisconsin. The trophy goes annually to the American-born jumper placing highest in the national championships.

Even though he once served the Central Ski Association as a secretary, Doc Bradley never considered himself a true devotee of so-called “organized skiing.” He actually was an activist at the skiing level while not an organizational man, he did inspire leadership from which came the University of Wisconsin Hoofers’ Club. The Bradleys, along with other faculty and student friends, started a winter vacation trend which eventually led to Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, the Sierras of California, Sun Valley in Idaho, and Colorado.

The idea of using skis to explore the Sierra became a fascinating dream for Doc Bradley and, finally, a reality several times.

Bradley, in 1920, while on a visit to his parents in Berkeley, skied alone over the Snow-Shoe Thompson trail from Placerville across Echo Summit to Tallac, by boat across Lake Tahoe, and then on skis again down the Truckee. Over the same route between 1856 and 1869, Snow-Shoe Thompson made ski history, some historians having referred to the stalwart Norwegian mail carrier as the “greatest of them all” when it came to ski sport in the early days.



Other invasions of the Sierra saw Bradley in 1925 with Sierra Ski Club member tracking the Donner Summit snows; in 1935, with son Charles, crossing Tioga Pass from Lee Vining to Yosemite National Park; and again in 1947 going into the High Sierra from Lee Vining for six weeks, accompanied by three sons.

Doc Bradley later retired to Berkeley. Dr. Harold C. Bradley was elected into the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1969.

