

#77

## Carl Howelsen

Born: 1877 Died: 1955

*Carl Howelsen was born in Christiania, Norway, on March 23, 1877, immigrating to the United States in June 1905. Prior to his arrival in the United States, he achieved nearly every skiing honor the Norwegians had to offer.*



Carl Howelsen at 28 years of age immigrated to the United States, loaded with honors because of his virtuosity as a skier. Beginning in 1895, he had scored among the top jumping and cross-country competitors participating in Holmenkollen tourneys. Always seeking the coveted Nordic combined championship, Howelsen won the grueling 50-kilometer race twice in a row, his final triumph in 1903 carrying him to combined championship of what is considered the greatest nordic tourney of the world. His trophy included the Crown Prince Silver Cup, the King's Silver Cup and Holmenkollen Gold Medal.

Howelsen's Americanization began as a ski performer with the Ringling Brothers' Circus. During this period, he also helped organize the Norge Ski Club in Chicago. However, circus life and improvised wood and canvas slides had no permanent appeal for a man who longed for deep snow country and could not locate suitable terrain in Midwestern America. Around 1910, Howelsen reached Colorado and set out on skis to explore the Rocky Mountains. One trek took him to Hot Sulphur Springs, where he halted long enough to help stage what may have been the first ski tourney in Colorado. This was two miles north of Steamboat Springs and near the slopes he believed should prove excellent for skiing.

Tales concerning "that wild Swede" began circulating soon after snow arrived. It was reported Howelsen had built a platform on a hillside, packed down the snow above and below it, and with slats attached to his feet was hurtling through the air 60 to 70 feet. Thus ski jumping came to Steamboat, which later that winter organized its first snow sports carnival under the expert supervision of the newly-arrived Norwegian. This beginning was followed in 1915 with another jump on the much larger and steeper hill south of town that now bears the name Howelsen Hill.

Thanks to snow sports influences set in motion by Carl Howelsen, Steamboat Springs, Colorado, was dubbed "Ski Town, U.S.A." What began more than half a century ago on a steep snow-covered slope now named Howelsen Hill saw ski sport spread from a jumping trajectory to encompass adjacent downhill trails into a competitive-recreational complex of great significance to American ski sport. Steamboaters conclude it never would have been possible but for Howelsen, who climaxed his Colorado sojourn in 1922 by winning the Class A jumping championship of the National Ski Association of America.

A very special rapport soon developed between Howelsen and youngsters of Steamboat. The community was quick to realize that in the Norwegian, a stockily built and good-humored man, it had acquired something very special. This resulted in the formation of Steamboat Springs Winter Sports Club, oldest organization of its kind in Colorado.

Carl Howelsen never again tracked Colorado snows after winning the national championship in 1922, which may have been his greatest regret. A desire to visit his parents took him back to Oslo and, although he had intended to return to Steamboat, he married and settled in his native country. Nevertheless, the Norwegian-American continued ski jumping until 1948. He also kept in close touch with ski sport in this country, first through friends, in Steamboat and then by greeting Colorado Olympians who invaded Norway for the Winter Games of 1952. The man who inspired countless Coloradoans, died in 1955 at the age of 78, but wherever skiers congregate in North America the fame of Carl Howelsen is a living memory.

Carl Howelsen was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1969.

