

Dave & Roma McCoy

Founders Mammoth Mountain



Dave McCoy was born in Los Angeles on August 24, 1915 to **William Thomas McCoy** and **Edna Rachel Medcalf**. He spent the first six years of his life in El Segundo, California where his father worked in an oil refinery. From age six until age twelve Dave traveled the length of California with his parents. After graduating from the eighth grade, Dave moved to Washington to live with his grandparents. It was during his time in Washington that Dave was introduced to skiing by a group of Norwegian ski jumpers who told him to “just point ‘em down the hill and ride.” Dave took every chance possible to hike up White Pass Mountain and ski straight down as fast as possible.

The day after his high school graduation Dave hitched his way to Independence where he caught his first glimpse of the woman he would eventually marry. It wasn't until two years later, when Dave was living in Bishop, that he was finally introduced to Roma. They dated for four years before they were married.

In 1936, Dave applied for a job as a hydrographer with the Department of Water and Power, a job that required interpreting data from snow surveys to predict future water supplies for Los Angeles. Although he was not qualified for the hydrographer position, his excellent skiing skills helped him land a job as a snow surveyor, where he remained for 18 years.

During his employment with the DWP, Dave's love for skiing led to an interest in competitive ski racing. After many victories, at only 22 years old he became California State Champion. Dave's passion for the sport led him to skiing pioneers **Tex Cushin** and **Corty Hill** at McGee Mountain. As a member of the Eastern Sierra Ski Club, Dave helped keep the cable-sling lift maintained and running. He also helped build the club's first portable rope tow. They took a Model “A” Ford truck, pulled the drive wheel off, locked the brake, jacked up the rear end and ran a rope up the mountain to a pulley. This “portable” rope tow allowed the skiers to ski anywhere in the valley from Independence to Bridgeport, searching for hidden stashes of powder.

In 1938, Dave acquired the permit to operate a permanent rope tow on McGee Mountain. He was able to purchase the lifts from the Eastern Sierra Ski Club for \$85. To raise funds for the equipment, he hocked his Harley-Davidson for a bank loan. Asked if it was hard to part with his motorcycle, he said “No – it was just hard to convince the bank to give me \$85 for it.” At the time Roma was working as a secretary for the bank and was able to convince them that Dave was a good risk. In 1941, Dave obtained a roving permit for his own portable rope tow. When the weather would allow it and the roads were clear, he took his portable rope tow into Mammoth.

After the war, Dave installed his first permanent rope tow on the north side of Mammoth Mountain. The Forest Service decided to put the permit to operate at Mammoth Mountain up for bid, but no one bid on it, including Dave, because he didn't have the money. In 1953, the Forest Service awarded Dave the permit on the condition that he begin developing the mountain. He already had a thriving rope tow business. The Main Lodge's predecessor, known as “the Snake Pit,” was a mere 12' x 24' with a dirt floor and outside toilet which served as a first aid station, snack bar and eventually home for the cash-strapped McCoy's.

Dave went to the bank and asked for \$135,000 to build a chairlift, add on to the Snake Pit, and pay salaries for a year. This time the bank turned him down. **Walter Martinoni** had built a chair for a client who decided he didn't want it. Walter gave Dave the chair with the understanding that Dave would install it himself and pay Walter as soon as he made money.

Dave and a group of hard-core skiers built their own crane, dug the tower holes by hand, mixed the cement and installed the motor, brakes, clutches and drive system. Mammoth Mountain's first chairlift opened on Thanksgiving Day, 1955, just in time to meet his permit requirements. Dave has installed an average of one lift every year since and Mammoth's crews still install their own lifts.

Dave skied, ran the mountain and coached young racers. He is one of the most successful racing coaches in ski history, seeing 19 of his team members represent the United States on the Olympic Team. ■

