

Mammoth Visions

1953–1955

ON AUGUST 12, 1953, AFTER THREE MONTHS OF negotiations, Slim Davis wrote Dave McCoy a personal letter stating, “This confirms the issuing to you yesterday of a [25 year] term permit for the further development and operation of the Mammoth Mountain Ski Area.” McCoy agreed to construct a service building with water and sewage systems by November 1953, form a corporation by August 1954, build a chair lift by December 1956, construct a shelter hut at the upper terminus by November 1957 and a second chairlift by December 1960.⁴⁸

Determined to remain a family-owned business, Dave set out to secure his own financial backing. No such luck. The ski business was far too risky, he was told, for a man without collateral. With verbal permission but no Forest Service permit and a grand total of \$12,500 in personal loans to back him up, Dave broke ground on his Warming Hut. He refurbished a donated 10,000-gallon water storage tank with rivets and tar, hand-dug a hole to house it, and laid a quarter mile of plastic hose connecting the tank to a spring farther up the mountain. He hired Lloyd Nicoll to frame a foundation while junior racers Rhubarb Marcellin, Kenny Lloyd, and twelve-year-old Gary McCoy helped him collect scrap rebar and hand shovel aggregate from a pit near Rock Creek.

By November 1953, two weeks after the birth of his sixth child, 38-year-old Dave McCoy concluded that to be a successful ski area operator, he needed to devote all his time and energy to that endeavor. He requested a leave of absence from his LADWP job of sixteen years, sold his fishing boats to the LADWP, and moved his family to his McGee ski-tow warming hut.

By winter of 1953-54, a newly-paved Minaret Road,

an improved parking area, and the friendly atmosphere of a crackling fire in the huge rock fireplace of the just-completed Warming Hut welcomed skiers to McCoy’s Mammoth rope tows. Feeling like extended family, they chatted with ticket-sellers, most often Nick Gunter and wives of Dave’s friends who were helping him with the tows. They skied with Mark Zumstein’s Mammoth Ski Patrol, who were mostly volunteers from the Avalanche Ski Club, teased McCoy’s junior racers, and doted on the smiling faces of the six McCoy children—several of them already sporting Mammoth race team uniforms.

Yet during the summer of 1954, an unfamiliar feeling of discouragement nagged at Dave: he had not been able to secure financing to build a chairlift. He had talked to bankers, walked door to door in Bishop asking for support, even explored the possibility of using an old tramway from the Cerro Gordo mine. Just when he could think of no other avenues to pursue, a stranger knocked on his door.

Walter Martignoni of United Tramways went right to the point. Another ski area had canceled its order for a chairlift...would Dave take it? Dave said he couldn’t pay. Not to worry, Martignoni told him, he would carry the cost until they worked out a feasible payment plan. On a handshake, the two men sealed the deal.

Dave McCoy turned his attention to the 1954-55 ski season and his current flock of promising ski racers. His junior team was monopolizing the Far West division and four of his seniors—one of them local racer Jill Kinmont, whose vibrant smile and winning form had made her the unofficial darling of American skiing—were contenders for the 1956 Olympic Team.



1954 California American Legion Team in Sun Valley, from left: John Murphey, Gus White, Bob Kinmont, Gary McCoy, Toni Culver, Jill Kinmont. Coach Dave McCoy kneeling in front. Dave brought Gary, his twelve-year-old son, along to the race and allowed him to forerun the downhill that shot down "Exhibition," a steep and bumpy run.



Bishop Union High School Ski Team, 1954. Top row, from left: Bob Marcellin, Bob Gribben, Captain Bob Kinmont, John Denault, Jay Lucas, Lee Degraffenreid, Richard Fischer. Front row, from left: Katherine Anne Morrison, Linda Meyers, Janice Castagno, Paula Sue Gann, Betty Kilpatrick. Note the new hand-knit snowflake team sweaters.

Ski Racing Mid 1950s



Jill, Bob Kinmont Win National Titles
McCoy-Coached Team Takes Six Of 18 Medals

Kinmonts Win Fourth of July Slalom Events

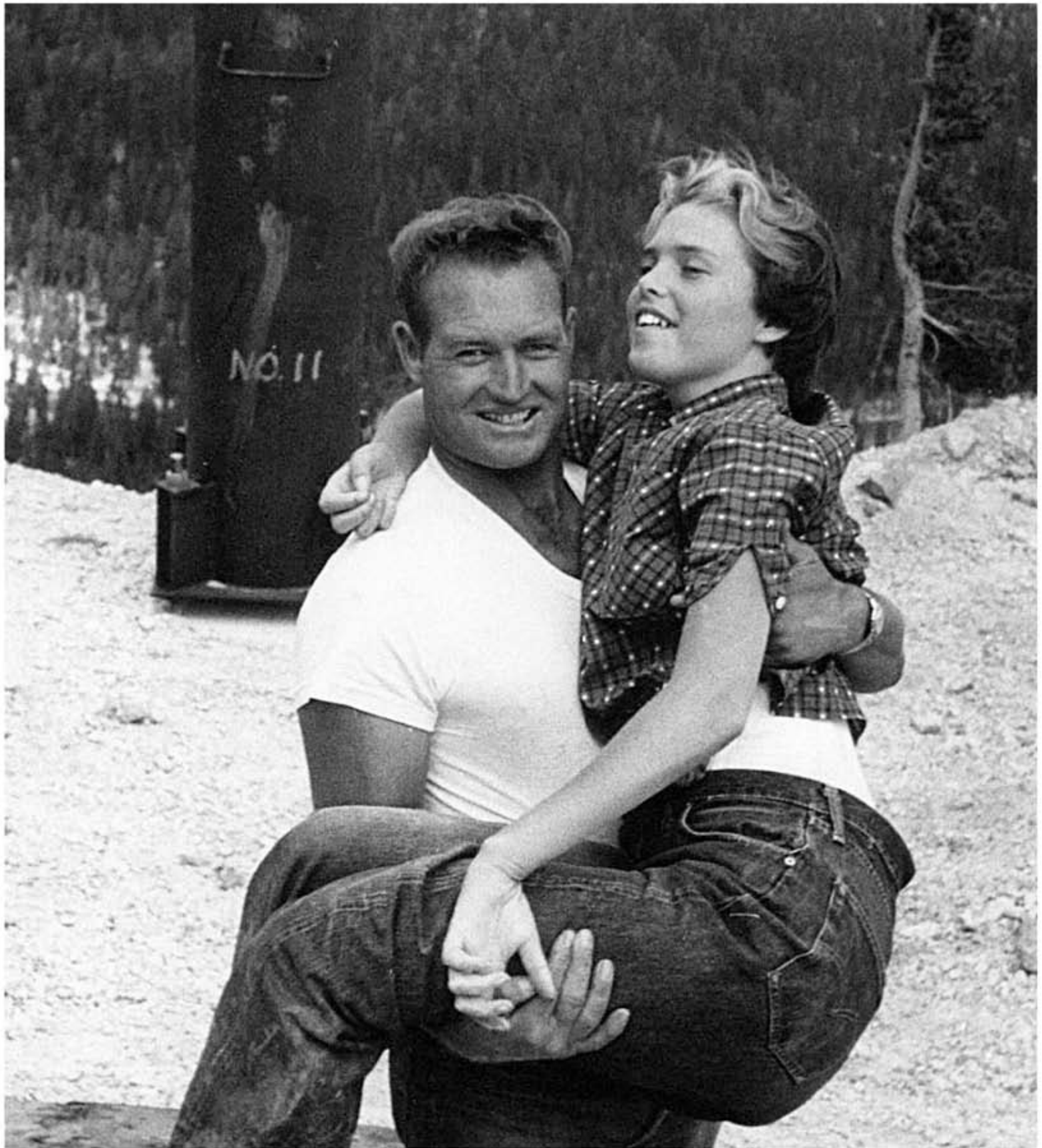
Osborn Leads Inyo-Mono Skiers In National Giant Slalom Meet



Bob "Rhubarb" Marcellin



Dave's 4 x 4 GI portable cement-mixer truck that carried sand and gravel in the bed, 150 gallons of water in barrels, and cement bags on top.



Dave McCoy showing Jill Kinmont the Chair 1 towers, early November 1955, less than a year after her accident.