



A Sun Valley  
**HISTORICAL**  
Walking Tour



# **If These Walls Could Talk**

## **A Walk Through Sun Valley's History**

### **- Part 1 -**

#### **The Sun Valley Lodge**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In March of 1936, not far from where you stand, a short, stout New York publicist surveyed what was to become his next project: a barren cattle field, waiting for the birth of a luxury ski lodge. Despite the snow filling his Fifth Avenue loafers, Steve Hannagan felt warm. The intense heat of the deep-winter Idaho sun was remarkable. In that moment, Hannagan knew how to convince the rich and famous to travel to the middle of nowhere and risk their necks hurtling down a mountainside in the decidedly uncivilized pursuit of skiing. He was going to lure them with the promise of "Winter Sports Under a Summer Sun." He was going to call it Sun Valley.

Sun Valley Resort exists because of three men: Hannagan, William Averell Harriman and Count Felix Schaffgotsch. The brains, the money and the brawn behind the project respectively, this trio turned the then crazy idea of building a magnificent palace in the snow into a reality. Harriman, chairman of the Union Pacific Railroad, was a famous playboy whose passion for glamorous pursuits inspired the idea of creating America's first destination ski resort at the end of one of his railroads. The promise of passenger traffic on the freight-heavy line was enough to convince UP's board and, after a snow-seeking odyssey across the Wild West, Count Schaffgotsch found the perfect spot. Then, with Hannagan's marketing genius, Harriman's cash and connections, and the charming Count's direct line to the best ski instructors in Europe, a legend was born.

**STOP ONE** Stand on the path at the edge of the duck pond and take in a panoramic view of the Sun Valley Lodge. The X-shaped building is virtually unchanged from when it was constructed in the summer of 1936. Four stories high, with 220 rooms (now 148), the building rose from the ground in less than eight months and cost \$1.5 million. You could be forgiven for assuming it's a traditional wooden lodge. In fact, the walls are made from concrete, to ensure it would not suffer the fate of its architect's previous project, the Grand Canyon Lodge, which burned to the ground three years earlier. Each "log" was made by pouring concrete into wooden molds and then staining and stenciling it to resemble wood.

**STOP TWO** Walk around the pond and let one of Sun Valley's genial doormen welcome you into The Lobby. Here you will stand in a room not much changed since Gary Cooper stepped inside on opening day, December 21, 1936. On your right is a portrait of Harriman, Sun Valley's founder. Harriman had the Lodge furnished and decorated by Newport socialite Marjorie Oelrichs Duchin, the best friend of his wife Marie. Marjorie banished the color white from the interior, even from the linens. Instead, yellows, oranges and greens, complemented by rich red carpets and navy blue upholstery dominated the decor. When it first opened, alongside the usual requirements of a hotel, the Lodge also boasted a barber shop, a beauty parlor, a surgery department, a bachelor's lounge (which quickly became a game room), writing rooms and, of course, a ski room. Saks Fifth Avenue also opened a store, selling the latest in skiing fashions from Manhattan that combined the style of the era with the practicalities of the unladylike pursuit of hurtling down a mountainside on two planks of wood.

**STOP THREE** Step through the lobby and to your left into The Duchin Lounge. The Lodge's premier nightspot, the lounge was originally located where Gretchen's Restaurant is today and the Saks Fifth Avenue store was in lounge's current location. Contrary to a popular myth, The Duchin Lounge was not named for famous forties' bandleader Eddie Duchin, who played at Sun Valley many times, but for his wife Marjorie, in recognition of her work designing the Lodge's interior.

**STOP FOUR** Cross the lobby to Gretchen's Restaurant. Opened in 1985 after the lobby was remodeled, it was named for America's first Olympic skiing champion, Gretchen Fraser. Fraser was the star pupil of Sun Valley ski school director Otto Lang, who had her stand in for his friend the ice-skater Sonja Henie in the skiing scenes of *Thin Ice* (1937) and *Sun Valley Serenade* (1941). Fraser and her husband Don lived in Sun Valley for many years until their deaths in 1994. Fraser's ashes were scattered over Gretchen's Gold, the Baldy run named in honor of her victories at the 1948 Olympics in St. Moritz.

**STOP FIVE** Exit the lobby through the northern corridor, otherwise known as the Hall of Fame. Also installed in 1985, this gallery of photographs showing off many of the Lodge's rich and famous guests was the brainchild of Earl Holding, the resort's owner since 1977. Look for photos of the Kennedy family vacationing on Sun Valley's slopes, local residents Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jamie Lee Curtis, classic crooners such as Louis Armstrong and Bette Midler, and legends of the silver screen including Clarke Gable and Claudette Colbert, all of whom were regular visitors to the resort.

**STOP SIX** Continue down the hallway to the Lodge Pool. Originally intended to mimic Idaho's natural hot springs, Union Pacific was unable to strike a deal with the State to pump its water into the pool. So the management decided to make its own. Large vats were installed in the basement to mix precisely the required minerals into the water. However, the resulting sulphuric stench was considered unbearable, and rapidly the mineral concentration was reduced just to a few teaspoons, still technically hot springs to draw people to the resort, but no longer obnoxious for those already here.

**STOP SEVEN** On your way back to the lobby there is a doorway on

your right that leads downstairs to the Bowling Alley. Installed in the summer of 1940, the bowling alley had been part of the original plans for the in-house entertainment of the Lodge. It joined a game room, which featured a very popular ping-pong table and a not so popular piano. One of the first guests at the resort, *Gone With the Wind* producer David O' Selznick, was slightly appalled at having to pay for his ping-pong balls, especially as he kept losing them.

**STOP EIGHT** Return to the lobby and take the elevator to the second floor. In front of you is the Sun Room. Offering excellent views of the ice rink and Bald and Dollar Mountains, it was originally called the Redwood Room. In here, on July 17, 1954, Groucho Marx, 63, married actress Eden Hartford, 24. It was the groom's third wedding.

**STOP NINE** From the Sun Room turn left down the hall and towards the Lodge Dining Room. Before you enter, glance down the hallway to your left. At the far end is Room 206. Arguably the most famous room in the resort, it was here Ernest Hemingway wrote the majority of *For Whom The Bell Tolls* on a wooden desk specially installed for the author. He first came to Sun Valley on September 20, 1939 with soon-to-be-wife number three, Martha Gellhorn. A passionate hunter, Hemingway was lured to the resort by publicist Gene Van Guilder as a way to promote the new fall season. He fell in love with Idaho, returning most years to his "Glamour House." He finished *For Whom The Bell Tolls* on October 10, 1940, and sent the galleys to his publisher right from The Inn's camera shop.

**STOP TEN** Sun Valley's grand opening dinner was held in the Lodge Dining Room on December 21, 1936. A lavish affair, *Life* magazine said the Lodge opened with "As fancy a crew of rich socialites as have ever been assembled under one roof." Along with a menu featuring Beef Tea des Viveurs and Ananas Surprise Union Pacifique, guests were treated to a good old-fashioned fistfight. David O'Selznick threw a punch at a Chicago banker who presumed to ask Claudette Colbert for a dance. The resulting headline, "Sun Valley Opens With a Bang," cemented the hotel's place in history as the most talked about destination ski resort for decades to come.



# If These Buildings Could Talk

## A Walk Through Sun Valley's History

### - Part 2 -

#### The Sun Valley Village

**STOP ONE** Begin your tour of Sun Valley's grounds at the outdoor ice rink. Installed in 1936, the rink was a main attraction for the new winter resort. Steve Hannagan, Sun Valley's publicist, was far from convinced that starlets and socialites wanted to hurtle down a hillside, and he deemed skating far more glamorous. Today, it is one of the world's premier outdoor ice-skating venues, attracting Olympians such as Sasha Cohen, Johnny Weir and Evan Lysacek to perform in its summer ice shows. The very first ice show was held on the evening of Thursday, February 24, 1938. The Austrian ski instructors kicked off festivities by slalomming down Dollar Mountain carrying flares. This torchlight parade, as it became known, is a tradition that is now a centerpiece of Sun Valley's Christmas celebrations. That first ice show however, was not quite of the caliber of today's. Instead of Olympians it featured brave resort guests waltzing on the ice with flares in hand, comical musical chairs and Union Pacific staff who had been given such expert choregraphical instruction as "just move around." It proved such a hit that a repeat performance was ordered for the next week, and ice shows have continued at Sun Valley ever since.

**STOP TWO** Now take a walk from the resort's oldest entertainment venue to its newest. Keep the rink on your right and follow the path away from the Lodge toward the Sun Valley Pavilion. This impressive feat of architecture is the jewel in the crown of the six buildings Sun Valley's most recent owner, Earl Holding, contributed to the resort during his 35 years of ownership. One of Mr. Holding's favorite sayings was "If it's worth doing, it's worth overdoing," and the Pavilion is overdone in the best possible way. Opened in 2008 through a partnership with the Sun Valley Summer Symphony, this one-of-a-kind performing arts facility was constructed with 1,000 tons of marble from the same quarry as the

stone used to build Rome's Coliseum. In its young life it has hosted such glittering names as Garth Brooks, the San Francisco Ballet, Bill Cosby and, of course, the world famous Sun Valley Summer Symphony.

**STOP THREE** Walk from the Pavilion around the Lodge and towards the Sun Valley Village. You will pass three cottages. The first is The Harriman Cottage. Built in the summer of 1937, this was Sun Valley's original "vacation home," and is still available to rent today. "I wanted to have a place to come and live," Harriman said in 1983. "And I wanted to encourage people to build houses in the valley. I didn't want any more hotels to be built. I didn't want it to be cluttered up as [if] it was a big resort. But I wanted people to come here and live and enjoy it either as a home or as a second home of sorts. All of that was part of the original idea. It has worked out very satisfactorily." The other two cottages were added in the fall of 1940, one for Dr. Moritz, the resident surgeon, and the other for Friedl Pfeiffer, then the new head of the ski school, although he never lived in it. These are now The President's and Guest cottages and can also be rented.

**STOP FOUR** Continue along the sidewalk to the bus circle at the entrance to the Sun Valley Village, and stop just below the flagpole. Here you'll find The Tenth Mountain Division Rock. This memorial to The Ski Troops, as they were known, honors the many Sun Valley alumni and residents who fought in the division during WWII. The Tenth is famous for helping push the Germans from the snow covered mountains of Italy, effectively ending the war, but they lost a quarter of their number in the process. Three mountains in the valley are named for fallen Sun Valley employees who served in The Tenth: Handwerk Peak after a waiter at the Ram; Duncan Ridge for a former Lodge employee; and Bromaghin Peak for a ski instructor.

**STOP FIVE** Just beyond the rock, to the left of the recreation center, is another of the resort's links to WWII. These statues are in memory of two members of the Tenth, Austrian ski instructors Sigi Engl and Sepp Froehlich, who between them worked 72 seasons at Sun Valley. Engl initially applied in 1938, but was turned down by Harriman. By the following season however he was firmly ensconced at the resort, and worked here for more than three decades. He served as director of

the ski school from 1952 to 1975. Froehlich arrived at Sun Valley the year after Engl, but the outbreak of WWII saw him, Engl and three other Austrian instructors arrested by the FBI on suspicions of harboring Nazi sympathies. Engl immediately joined the U.S. Army, but Froehlich spent nearly three months in prison before enlisting. He went on to win a Silver Star for gallantry in the Pacific.

**STOP SIX** Follow the path past the bank and turn right to the Sun Valley Opera House. The 320-seat movie theater was added in the resort's second season, and its early ties to Hollywood were strong enough to secure a much-sought-after copy of *Gone With The Wind* in the first few weeks of its release. (Wind producer David O'Selznick was a friend of Harriman's and helped him publicize Sun Valley, although he disapproved of the name, he thought it should be called Ski Haven.) Today, alongside hit movies, catch a showing of Sun Valley Serenade most days. The 1940s classic features scenes shot at the resort as well as future gold medalist Gretchen Fraser skiing for star Sonja Henie.

**STOP SEVEN** From the Opera House proceed around the duck pond, taking in the glass enclosed exterior of the resort's second circular pool (identical to the one in the Lodge), and walk along the length of the Sun Valley Inn. "Realizing that one hotel doesn't make a resort, Sun Valley this year opened another spacious hostelry, much more moderate in price," *Esquire* wrote in its February 1938 article *Enter the Ski-golo*. The title referenced the original ski school director Hans Hauser's stable of Austrian skier instructors. It turns out they were all "singularly adept in teaching that old world technique to our susceptible American maidens." Originally called The Challenger Inn, after Union Pacific's passenger trains, the Inn is the centerpiece of the Sun Valley Village. Built to resemble a Tyrolean mountain village, the hotel was based on drawings by Ernst Fegté, the German set designer of the first movie shot in Sun Valley, *I Met Him in Paris* starring resort regular Claudette Colbert. The hotel's different facades were painted by American artist Walt Kuhn to enhance the illusion of a classic Austrian village street, when inside it is all one building.

**STOP EIGHT** Taking the path to your left, pass the Inn and arrive in front of The Ram restaurant. A relaxed, casual setting for socializing

after skiing, The Ram had a strong Austrian theme, right down to the long-stemmed wine-pourers called Weinhebers, imported from Vienna by Count Schaffgotsch. It was also a favorite of the celebrity guests. If you were here in 1938 you might spot Ginger Rogers tap dancing away to The Ram Trio's cheery tunes (possibly including the Hokey Pokey, which musician Larry Laprise claims to have invented here). Pop by in the winter of 1956 and Marilyn Monroe could be tucked away in a booth, relaxing after a day filming *Bus Stop* in the snow. Stop for dinner in the forties and sit next to Clark Gable, Bing Crosby or Gary Cooper. The Ram was a place where people let their hair down because, according to a 1958 *Sports Illustrated* feature on Sun Valley, "It has the New York nightclub feeling."

**STOP NINE** Continuing on through Sun Valley Village, follow the path to the left towards the Lodge. You'll pass through what was originally known as the Sun Valley Mall. Installed in 1966 by the resort's second owner, Olympic skier Bill Janss, the shopping street was modeled on the popular shopping mall concept of the time. Today it has been so tightly woven into the character of the original village that it is simply referred to as the Sun Valley Village. In fact, one spot here claims a link to the earliest history of the resort. The Brass Ranch skiwear boutique is named after the sheep and cattle ranch that once stood here.

# If These Mountains Could Talk

## A Walk Through Sun Valley's History

### - Part 3 -

#### Sun Valley Resort

**STOP ONE:** Take Sun Valley Road from the Lodge towards Ketchum and stop at the bright Red Barn on your left just before you reach the city. This barn is all that remains of the original Brass Ranch on which the resort was built. Used by the Brass family as a granary and machine shed, it is now an iconic image of Sun Valley. In January 1936, a week or so after Count Felix Schaffgotsch arrived in town and deemed the area "perfect" for a million-dollar ski resort, he bumped into Roberta Brass sitting on a fence pole near this very spot. "This is it," he told her. "This is where Union Pacific is going to put in a ski resort. Next year at this time there will be a thousand people here." Two months later Roberta's father Ernest sold the family's 3,888-acre sheep and cattle ranch to the railroad company for \$39,000, or about \$10 an acre. Construction of the Lodge began in May of that year, and its doors opened eight months later.

**STOP TWO:** Travel a few hundred yards along Sun Valley Road toward the Lodge and turn right down a dirt road to the Sun Valley Stables. It was here the Sun Valley Rodeo enjoyed its brief life. Having given little advance thought to what it would do with a ski resort during the summer, Union Pacific quickly whipped up a rodeo grandstand in the spring of 1937 and Sun Valley hosted its first Wild West rodeo on August 14. It proved too expensive however, and once visitors discovered the real draws of Sun Valley in the summer, the gimmick was no longer needed. The rodeo ended its regular run with the closing of the resort for WWII in 1942 and the stands were finally torn down in the late fifties.

**STOP THREE** Continue east a mile or so along Sun Valley Road past the Lodge to the magnificent Sun Valley Club. Built in 2008, this 58,000 square foot clubhouse provides a luxurious base from which to access 27 of the resort's 45 golf holes in the summer, and 25 miles of Nordic

trails in the winter. Union Pacific was quick to spot the importance of golf to a resort, starting work on the Sun Valley golf course in the fall of 1937. Designed by William P. Bell, it opened in the summer of 1938.

**STOP FOUR** Walk through the clubhouse and out to the expansive patio, where you will enjoy what is arguably the best view of Bald Mountain and Dollar Mountain in the valley. While it now stands as the centerpiece of Sun Valley Resort, Bald Mountain was not the initial attraction. When Schaffgotsch first arrived in the Wood River Valley, at the end of his six-week, 7,000 mile odyssey across the West in search of the ideal spot to build Harriman's ski resort, it was the gentle inclines of Dollar, Proctor and Ruud mountains that caught his eye. He certainly noticed the "bald" mountain, but deemed it too advanced for the majority of skiers in America, where the sport was still in its infancy. He was wrong. Although lifts didn't open on Baldy until December 23, 1939, even in the first season guests attempted to tackle its 3,400-foot vertical rise using the services of an early snowcat named "the tank."

**STOP FIVE** A few hundred yards further along Sun Valley Road look for a sign on your right pointing to the Hemingway Memorial. Take the trail down the hill and discover one of the most tranquil spots on the valley's floor. A bronze bust of Ernest Hemingway sits there, presiding over the trickling Trail Creek. Inscribed on the memorial is part of a eulogy Hemingway delivered for the man who brought him to Sun Valley in 1939. Gene Van Guilder was a publicist for the resort and an avid outdoorsman. He introduced Hemingway to the excellent hunting and fishing in the area, but tragically was shot in a hunting accident a few weeks after the author arrived at Sun Valley. A notoriously shy public speaker, Hemingway surprisingly agreed to write and deliver Van Guilder's eulogy, perhaps an indication of how comfortable he felt at Sun Valley. Sadly, Hemingway's association with Sun Valley ended with his suicide in 1961. He is buried in the Ketchum Cemetery a mile or so from this spot.

**STOP SIX** Walk back up to Sun Valley Road and take in the mountains suddenly towering over you to the south. Proctor and Ruud in front of you, and Dollar to your right, were the first mountains in the valley developed for skiing. But it was on Proctor Mountain that skiing

history was made. Named for Charlie Proctor, the American Nordic Olympian who together with Schaffgotsch selected the skiing terrain, the mountain was home to the world's first chairlift. Sun Valley's publicist Steve Hannagan greatly disliked skiing, and hated cold even more, so he constantly looked for ways to make the experience more comfortable. One of his better ideas was the concept of mechanical devices to take people to the top of the mountain. Putting the vast engineering knowledge of Union Pacific to work, the idea of a chairlift was born. Engineer James M. Curran's previous experience building a device to load bananas onto a ship inspired him to create a people-carrying version, and the world's first chairlift was installed on Proctor in December of 1936. The second was completed a few weeks later on Dollar. A J-bar lift was also installed on Proctor Mountain in 1936, but it was moved to Ruud Mountain and refitted with chairs the next year. That lift is the only one that still stands, and it is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. It can be visited via a short, but steep hike. From where you stand however, if there is no snow on the ground, you can just make out the original, decaying poles from that first chairlift on Proctor jutting up out of the hillside.

**STOP SEVEN** Head further up Sun Valley Road to the newly remodeled Sun Valley Gun Club on your left. First situated along what is now Fairway Road across from the Sun Valley Lake, the gun club was constructed from the Hot Potato Hut that once warmed chilly skiers at the top of Proctor Mountain. That original structure is still part of the club, but the addition of marble bathrooms and other amenities has greatly increased the building's luxury factor. Skeet shooting was once the most popular summertime activity at Sun Valley and the club hosted many internationally accredited shooting competitions. The addition in 1940 of Carl Bradsher, an internationally known skeet instructor from the exclusive Pennsylvania Rolling Rock Club, helped in generating interest in the sport. Today, that interest remains high, and the gun club claims the honor of teaching more beginners than any other club in the country.

**STOP EIGHT** Opposite the gun club is the entrance to Trail Creek Cabin. Opened in January 1939 to create a destination for Sun Valley's jingling scarlet and yellow bobsleighs, the cabin embraced all the rustic Western atmosphere that the Lodge lacked. Built not out of concrete but from

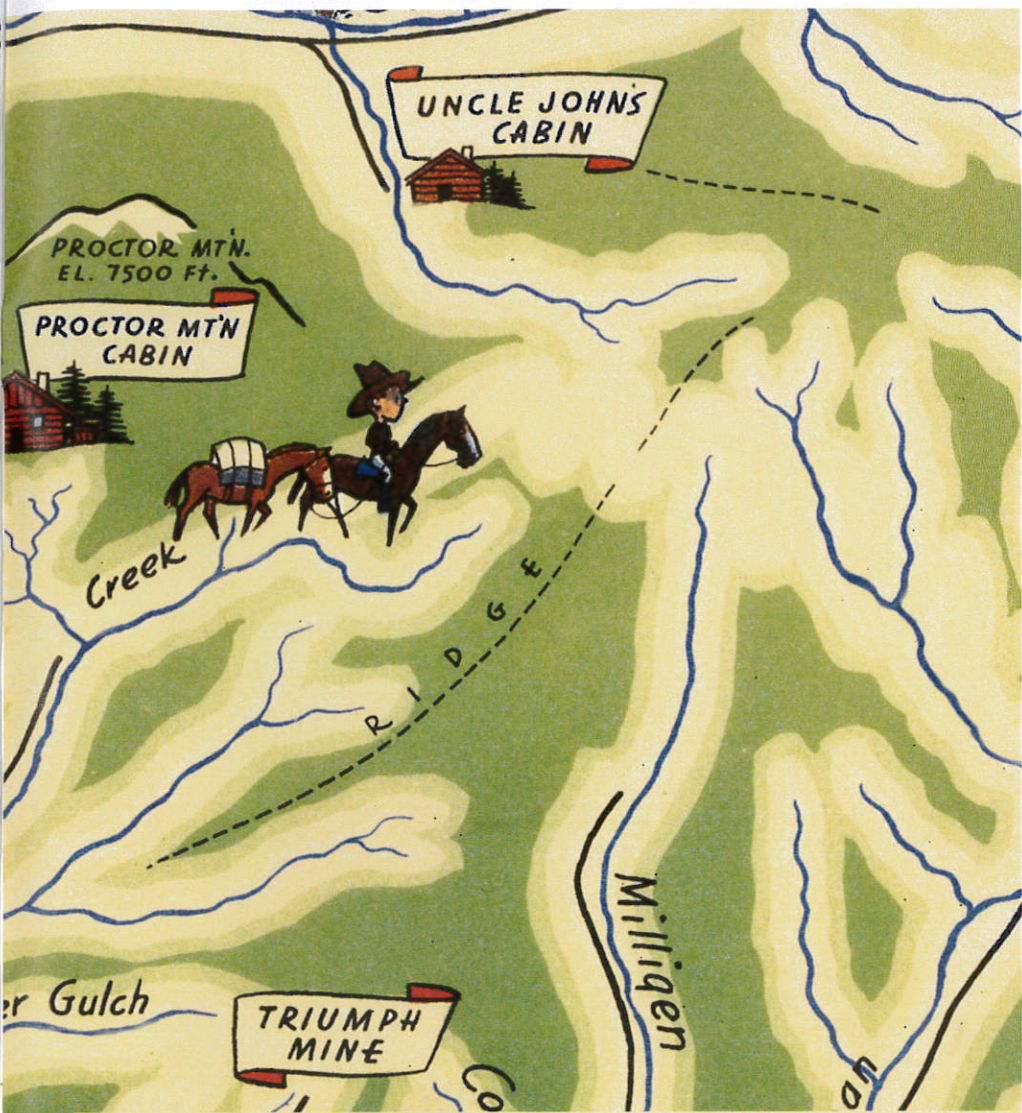
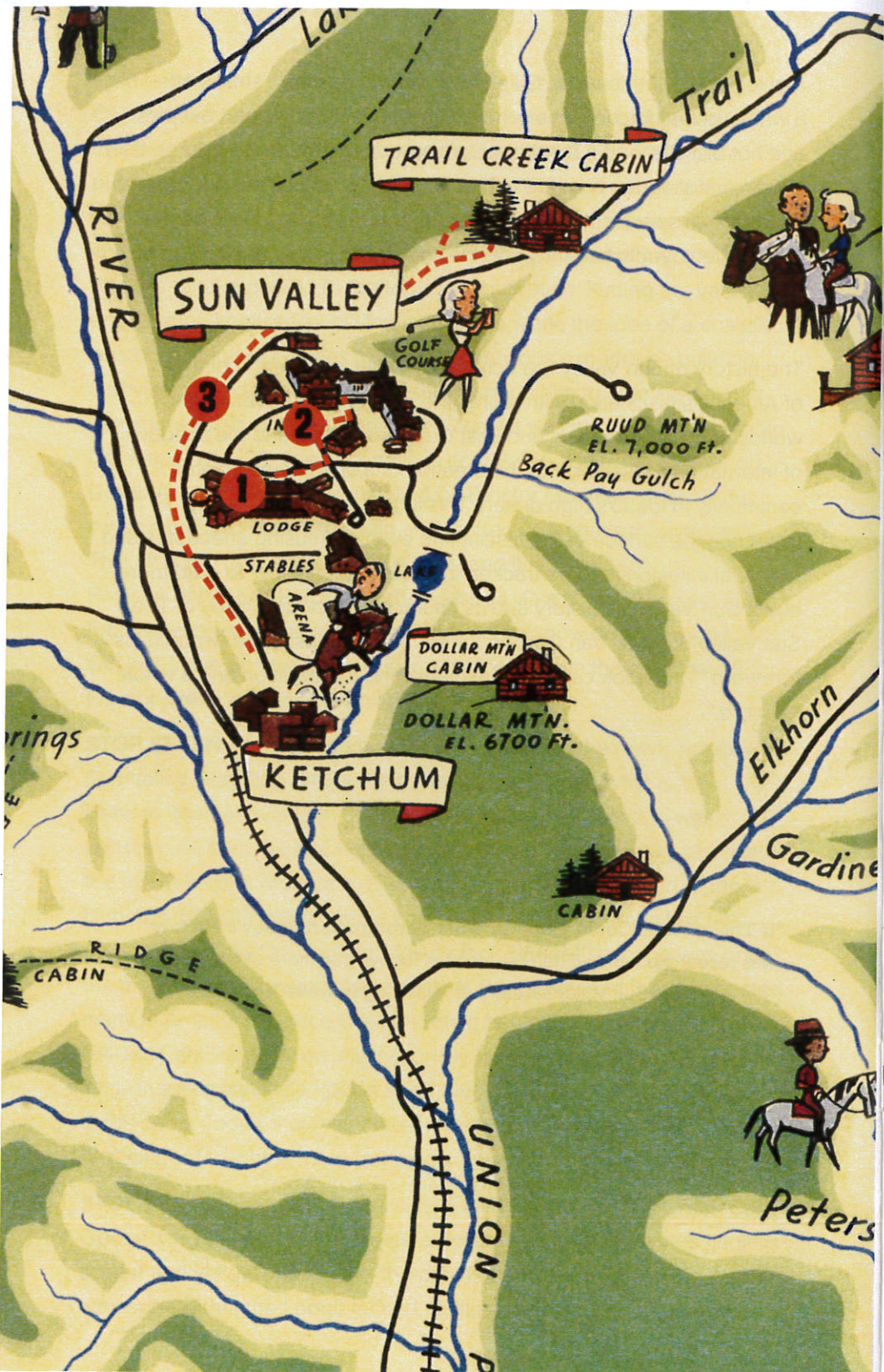
real logs brought down off Galena Summit, it boasted a small coffee bar, a whitewashed kitchen where host August Jacobsen turned out pies and hot biscuits, and a fire that was always burning. Today, you can take a seasonal sleigh or hay ride to the cabin and enjoy dinner surrounded by the same spectacular beauty that Ernest Hemingway and Martha Gellhorn enjoyed when they had their pre-wedding dinner here in March of 1939.

The history of Sun Valley is a rich tapestry that weaves the birth of America's fascination with skiing, the glamor of the overlapping worlds of Hollywood stars and East Coast socialites, and the shadow of international disaster, into the creation of a vibrant and special community in Idaho's high desert. This introductory tour merely scratches the surface of the fascinating events, amusing anecdotes and historical milestones to be tracked in this isolated valley. To read more about Sun Valley, its history and its characters, pick up a copy of *The Sun Valley Story* by Van Gordon Sauter. As Clint Eastwood wrote in his foreword "This book captures the magic and the tradition and a whole lot more."

**"If These Walls Could Talk – A Walk Through Sun Valley's History"**

was researched and written by Jennifer Tuohy, read more of her stories from Sun Valley's history at [www.blog.sunvalley.com](http://www.blog.sunvalley.com).





# SUN VALLEY • IDAHO

SCALE



## LEGEND

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Sun Valley Resort