

Ski Palomar Mountain

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Version 4, 7 January 2022

A ski resort on Palomar Mountain opened in the winter of 1966/1967, and closed the following season. In May 1966, a San Diego County special use permit was granted to Charles Darby for a ski resort on an eighty acre site owned by Carl 'Wog' Bergman, on the west side of the S6 road at the 5,200 foot level about a mile and a quarter north of the post office, and four miles from the Observatory ^{1,2,14}.



The developer was Charles H. Darby (left) of La Jolla who was a real estate broker, and had owned forty acres at Old Bull Pasture in Pedley Valley on Palomar Mountain, which he had purchased in 1951 or 1952, and which was known as Darby's Palomar Mountain Resort for several years ^{1,3}. He formed the Palomar Mountain Ski Company with his son Martin R. Darby as vice president ⁵.

At the outset, the estimated cost of the ski resort was \$250,000, with \$100,000 of that for snow-making equipment ¹. The ski area was 25 acres with 30 per cent slope, running from south to north ¹.

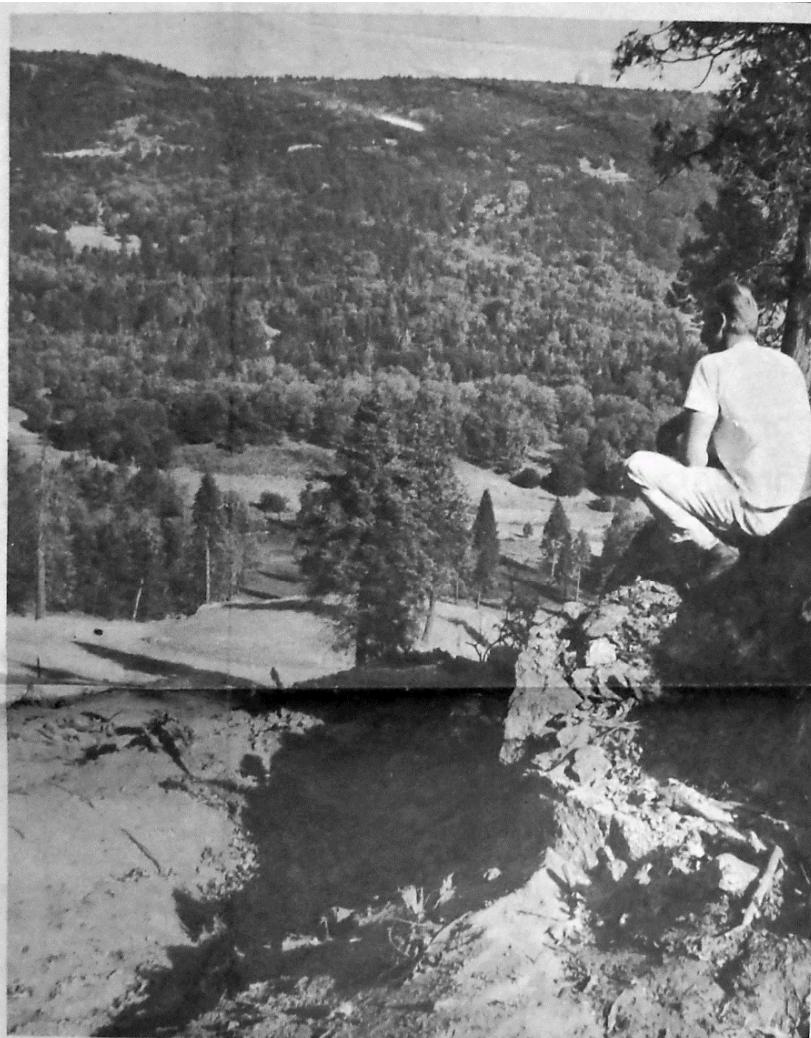


Artist's sketch shows lodge for proposed \$250,000 Palomar Mountain ski resort. The facility, near observatory, will feature a 2,000-foot main run, tows, a restaurant and machine-made snow.

The ski resort was planned to have two rope tows and a double T-bar tow, with a 4,800 square foot lodge with a restaurant, cocktail lounge, rental and sales facilities ¹.

From "San Diego Ski Area Open," Far West Skier, October 28, 1966:

San Diego County's only commercial downhill ski area, Palomar Mountain Ski Area, was developed by Charles H. Darby in the fall of 1966. Based on fifteen years of snow studies, the area opened with two 2,000 foot t-bars plus a pair of rope tows covering the beginners slope. Just in case Mother Nature proved to be fickle, they planned to install enough Larchmont snowmaking equipment to cover at least ten acres. The area had beginner to advanced terrain with slopes 10% to 25% incline. Darby, a La Jolla contractor, acted as president of his Palomar Mountain Corporation, with his son Martin serving as vice-president and James Murray, secretary-treasurer. Situated a mile and a quarter south of the renowned Mt. Palomar Observatory, the ski area had a number of advantageous amenities: a paved parking lot for more than 1,000 cars, a day lodge with a restaurant and ski shop, and a good county highway—Palomar Mountain's Highway to the Stars—for easy access to the area. The senior Darby spoke optimistically of his new area: "Our longest run measures 3500 feet and eventually we hope to have snowmaking equipment available for this as needed. We're sheltered and cold, and even though our top elevation is only 5600 feet we've studied this area long enough to know what we're doing."



MARTIN DARBY, vice president of Palomar Mountain Ski Co., checks the slope of a ski run carved into the side of the mountain. Palomar Observatory can be seen on the horizon. The county's first long ski season, expected to be 150 days in a typical year, will begin Dec. 1 on the new

runs. The company will create its own snowstorms every day the temperatures fall below freezing, to add to the natural snow and extend the season.

—Rudledge Photo, Escondido

By early November 1966, the 2,000 foot ski slope was finished, ready for an early December opening with machine manufactured snow ⁴. Tree clearing had begun in August, and was finished by November ¹².

A warming shed for skiers, a snack hut, and restrooms were constructed, with the lodge planned for 1967 ^{4,6,13}.

The planned opening was delayed due to rains and late arrival of snow making equipment ⁶.

Ski PALOMAR MOUNTAIN

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Classified ad in San Diego Union, November 2, 1966, page C4

CBS TV station 8 ran a story on Ski Palomar Mountain on 24 December 1966, with the script ¹⁶:

Except for a few trickles of water and a lot of mud leftover from recent rains, the upper slopes of Mount Palomar were sunny and beautiful today. But Mother Nature has yet to smile on one of the most ambitious projects on the mountain since the construction of the world-renowned observatory. The project—the quarter-million-dollar Palomar Mountain Ski Resort—almost was halted by heavy rains several weeks ago. Now, with fingers crossed and purse tightened, the operators of the new ski resort say they're ready to open tomorrow...just one problem though...there's no snow. Manager Sam Sherman and his crew don't seem too worried about this though, they plan to turn on their snow machines to make the fluffy white stuff tonight, in time for a white Xmas. They'll use compressed air and water forced under pressure through a simple nozzle to do the trick. As the air expands, it cools the water and if the air's cold enough, you get snow. Maybe skiers will get a Christmas present tomorrow with the opening of the new slopes. Maybe.

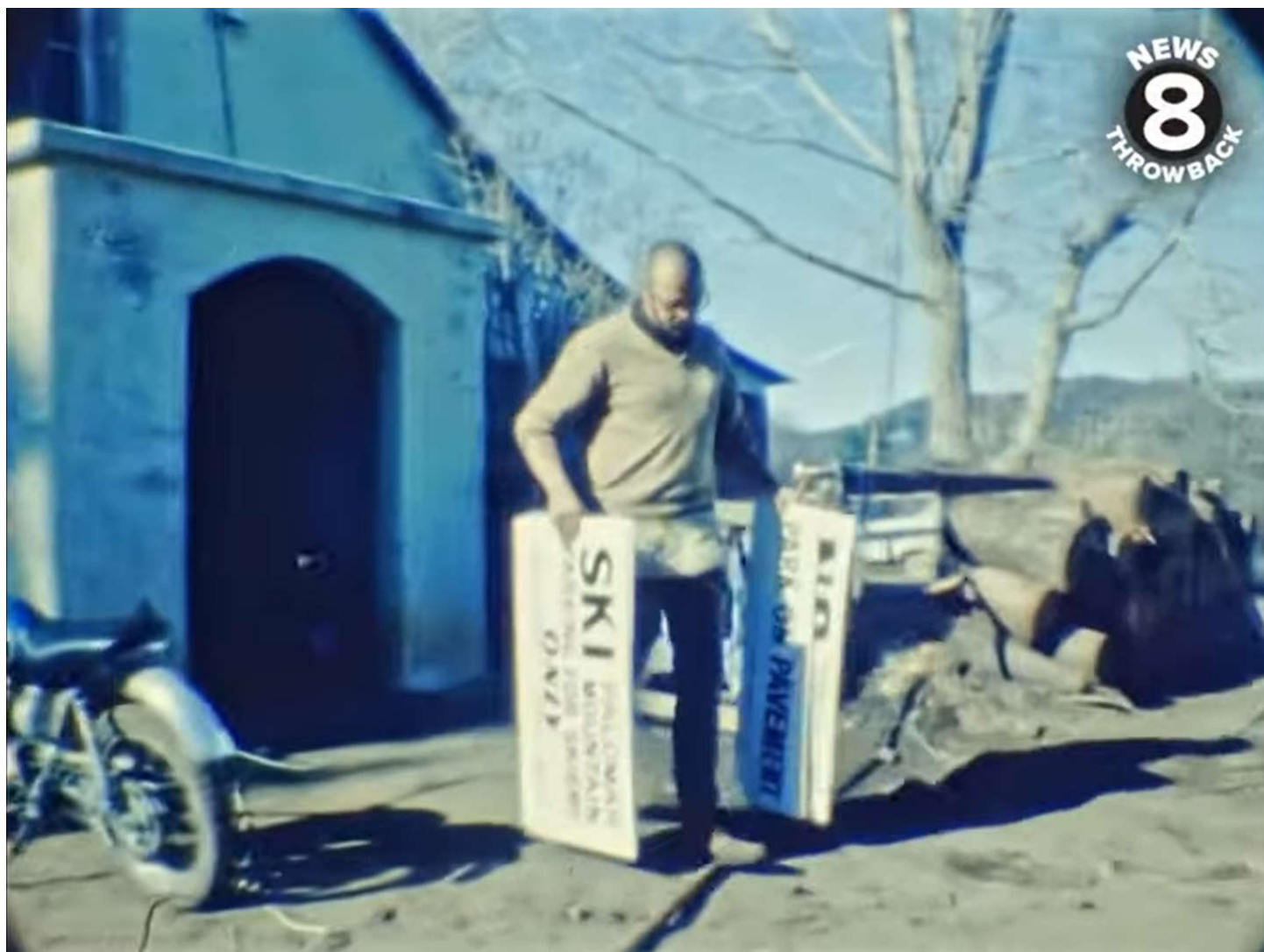


NEWS
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THROWBACK

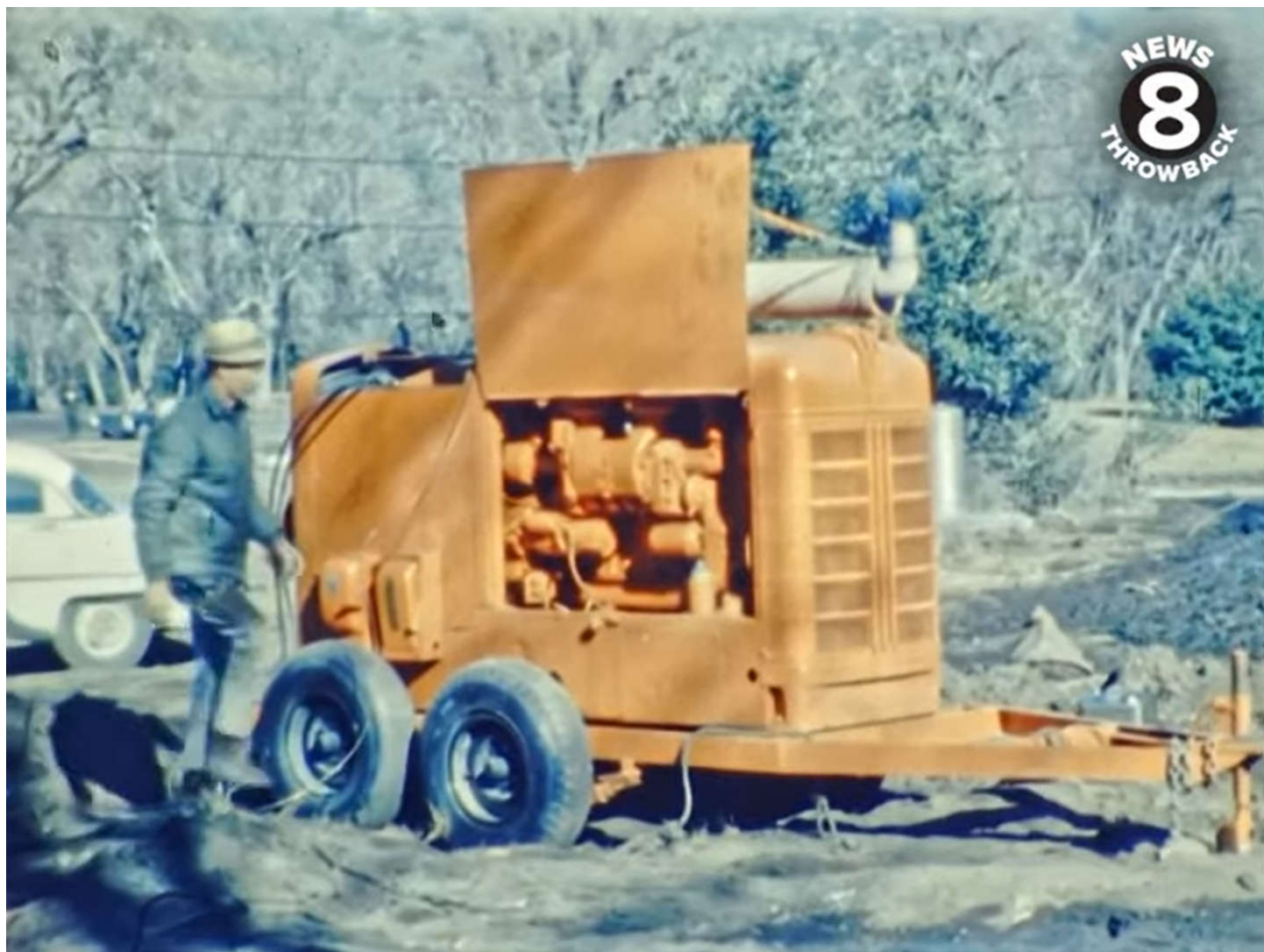












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Ski Palomar Mountain opened on January 7, 1967, with a man-made snow pack of two inches to several feet deep on a 500 foot long slope, with three rope ski tows ^{9,10,11}. There was a snack bar built at the bottom of the slope, and the work crew stayed at a cabin located at the slope ³.

Robin Howell, the daughter of Charles Darby, recalls that during the winter of 1966-1967, it operated about 10 days ³. There was publicity and excitement about it around San Diego County (including Ski Palomar bumper stickers and newspaper articles), and there was good attendance when there was snow ³.

The temperatures were often too high for making snow, and snow falls were not numerous ³.



SKI SLOPE BRINGS OWN SNOW TO PALOMAR MOUNTAIN

Ski instructor Russ Strom takes a test run at the recently-completed ski slope on Palomar Mountain. The slope, which opens today with four

runs, is the first man-made facility in the county and is capable of handling 4,000 skiers. A lodge and restaurant will be added in the spring.

This is one of a network of sprinklers that supplies Palomar Mountain's man-made slope with man-made snow. A compressor and coil

system covers the 2,200-foot run with a snow cover nightly. Patches of brown show through as the sprinkler sets down the initial coating.

San Diego Union, 7 January 1967, page B3

It's Fun On The Run At Palomar Mountain



Skiers turned out yesterday to take advantage of snow on Palomar Mountain Ski Resort's

runs. Unidentified skier, left, swoops past hay-bale markers but falls (next photo) and winds up

crawling (no easy thing on skis). Right, tow whisks skiers up slope. Cool weather was ex-

pected to preserve snow on county's mountains through today and new storm may be on tap.

San Diego Union 16 April 1967, Page B1

In its second season, Ski Palomar Mountain operations were managed by a local crew of three, including Wayne Thompson, the owner of the Summit Grove restaurant, store, and gas station located at the intersection of Highway S6 and State Park Road 15. The second season opened on 24 December 1967, with two and a half feet of snow on the run; a foot of snow was available on 30 December 1967 ^{8,15}.

No newspaper stories or items seem to have been published after December 1967, so it appears Ski Palomar Mountain ceased during that winter season.



From: Lost Ski Areas of Southern California. Ingrid P. Wicken. History Press, Charleston, SC: 2012. San Diego Union Tribune photo.



From: Lost Ski Areas of Southern California. Ingrid P. Wicken. History Press, Charleston, SC: 2012. San Diego Union Tribune photo.



San Diego Union Tribune photo.

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- 3= Robin Howell, personal communication, 2005
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- 5= San Diego County Independent, 9 Nov 1966, page 1
- 6= San Diego Union, 13 Dec 1966, page B3, column 6
- 7= San Diego Union, 14 April 1967, page C4, column 3
- 8= San Diego Union, 30 December 1967, page C1, column 7
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- 10= San Diego Union, 8 January 1967, page H1
- 11= San Diego Union, 12 March 1967, page F9, column 6
- 12= Escondido Times Advocate, 11 November 1966, page 1, column 1
- 13= Escondido Times Advocate, 23 January 1967, page 1, column 6
- 14= Escondido Times Advocate, 28 May 1966, page 1, column 5
- 15= Escondido Times Advocate, 24 December 1967, page 3, column 3
- 16= CBS 8 San Diego. Ski resort on Palomar Mountain in San Diego 1966. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ZY6hx_uxo4 , accessed 7 January 2022

PALOMAR MOUNTAIN



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