

MT SUNAPEE SKI AREA HISTORY

Mt. Sunapee State Park, like a number of NH state parks has an early history chapter closely linked with the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests (SPNHF). Extensive clear-cut logging on Mt. Sunapee from 1906-1910 alarmed townspeople and summer residents and led them to recruit the help of the SPNHF and raise \$8,000 for an initial purchase of 65 acres in 1911. The SPNHF was designated trustee of the Sunapee land, making it the Society's first reservation. As most of the land purchased had been recently logged over, it was primarily purchased to save it from repeated logging in the future; to set it aside as forest land for the use and enjoyment of future generations.

It was the opening of the Cannon Mountain Aerial Tramway which provided the impetus for a similar movement at Mt. Sunapee. A movement began to get a tramway for Mt. Sunapee by many local businesspeople who depended on the lake for income. A lobbying effort proved successful, and in 1941 Chapter 190 was passed which authorized the construction of an aerial tramway at Mt. Sunapee. A sum of \$375,000 was allocated for the project. The primary reason for building a tramway was not for winter skiing but was to support the slumping summer tourist trade. Among the main objectives were to revive the steamboat business as well as to increase revenue for the hotels and resorts. Therefore, the original plan called for the tramway station to be located right on the water's edge in Newbury Harbor. This would allow people to take a steamboat to the tramway station, board the tramway, and ascend the mountain.

The plan never became reality for a number of reasons, including World War II. The Sunapee movement had enough support to obtain extensions on the original bill. Chapter 155 of the Laws of 1943 gave the Sunapee tramway bill its first extension. Then in 1945 Chapter 153 extended the original bill again and also amended it. The amendment stated that there would be constructed at Mt. Sunapee in the town of Newbury a tramway "or other lifting device." Since during the early 1940s chairlifts had become popular, this amendment was of great significance in that it did not limit the Sunapee lift to an aerial tramway.

By 1945 a great commercial interest in skiing had developed, and within a year, two separate groups pushing for a lift on Mt. Sunapee had evolved. The first, or original group, still advocated having the lift start at the lakeshore. The goal of the second group was to find a spot to install the lift on the mountain where it could be utilized in both the summer and winter seasons. While this controversy was occurring, the state highway commissioner was conducting further studies into the Sunapee project. In the years following 1941 the original \$375,000 had shrunk due to inflation, and a tramway to depart from the lake's edge was determined to be far too expensive. New studies found that a feasible project would be to build a road into what is now the present park area and construct a chairlift to the north peak of the mountain. As a result, the North Peak Chair was constructed. Previous to the construction at Mt. Sunapee the land which had belonged to the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests was transferred to the state and became Mt. Sunapee State Park. David Heald was Sunapee's first park manager.

On December 26, 1948 Mt. Sunapee's facilities opened--included were the new 3,200-foot single chairlift, three main ski trails (Chipmunk, Flying Goose, and Hansen-Chase), and two rope tows. There was also a modern building at the base and a lodge at the top of the chairlift. Arrangements were made for an elaborate opening day ceremony, and everything took place as planned except for the fact that Mother Nature failed to provide any snow.

One interesting fact about the park at Mt. Sunapee is that according to the initial bill, Chapter 190 - Laws of 1941, the operation was supposed to be self-supporting. The first four out of five winters very little snow fell, and the ski business did not produce revenue enough to put the park in the black. During these lean winter years the summer operation did well. An average of 30,000 people per summer rode the chairlift to the top of the North Peak.

In 1950 the state acquired land on the lakeshore and opened the bathing beach. Later in 1953 Chapter 254 was passed allocating \$150,000 for the construction of the 2,500-foot Summit T-Bar. The Summit T-Bar followed the line of the present Northeast Bowl Chairlift. The t-bar was significant because it was not until the lift opened that the winter income of the park began to exceed the summer income. The Summit T-Bar raised the operational overhead by only 15%, yet it doubled the area's income capacity.

Most other capital improvements at Sunapee fell under Chapter 263 of the Laws of 1961. Chapter 263 was a \$9 million capital development bill to promote tourism. Of the \$9 million Sunapee received close to two million for improvements. It is clear that Chapter 263 was primarily responsible for making Sunapee the major recreation area that we know today.

Chapter 263 stated that, because of the benefits which would come to the state through income and to the economy of the community, the ski facilities at Cannon Mountain and at Sunapee should be expanded. The expansion at Mt. Sunapee as a result of Chapter 263 is as follows:

Preliminary Engineering	\$ 15,179
Scale Model	1,366
Telephone System	13,267
Equipment	21,287
North Peak Chairlift Conversion	35,000
J-Bar	24,007
Summit Chair-Gondola	496,487
Duckling Chairlift	138,477
Ski Shop & Shelter Building	50,773
Trail Construction	64,000
Land Acquisition	381,308
Park Access Road	210,265
Summit Lodge	245,501
Chairlift Safety Switches	19,136
Power and Substation	33,704
Sewage System	35,575
Province Chairlift	154,903
Province Slope Construction	30,728
Province Lift Line Survey	1,485

Total

\$1,973,146

Chapter 263 was landmark legislation for the New Hampshire state park system. Director Tobey informed Richard Parker, who had become the Sunapee manager in the mid-1950s, that an expansion plan should be submitted to allow for optimum summer and winter income potential at Sunapee. Mr. Parker had long been aware of various locations on the mountain where ski lifts and trails could be located to take advantage of the natural terrain. Within days Mr. Parker submitted his expansion plan. Also in 1961, Chapter 264 was passed allocating \$204,000 to Mt. Sunapee for the construction of the present two-story base lodge.

The following is a summary of the lift development at Sunapee:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Lift</u>	<u>Length</u>
1948	North Peak Chair*	3200
1953	Summit T-Bar*	3000
1957	Poma Lift*	1000
1960	Elliot T-Bar*	1400
1962	Summit Chair/Gondola*	7000
1962	Duckling Chair	1800
1962	Sunny J-Bar*	530
1965	Province Chair	1900
1967	Sun Bowl Bowl Chair	4226
1985	Province Pony	330
1986	Spruce Chair	2100
1987	Summit Chair	6300
1987	North Peak Chair	3400

*These lifts have been removed.

Chronological Notes on Mt. Sunapee's Development

- 1941 The legislature by way of Chapter 190 authorized the construction of an aerial tramway on Mt. Sunapee if studies proved it to be "self-liquidating." The study was to be made by the N.H. Tramway Commission previously established to oversee the operation of Cannon Mt. The sum of \$375,000 was authorized for the project.
- 1942 Report filed with Secretary of State on Jan. 10 indicated project would exceed authorized money and would not be self-liquidating.
- 1943 Legislature voted two year extension to Mt. Sunapee Tramway project.
- 1945 Legislature amended Chapter 190 to permit "other types of lifting devices" to be considered and to extend the project another four years. The highway commissioner was directed to conduct a feasibility study.
- 1947 Governor and Council approved comprehensive study made by highway engineers Malcolm Chase and Fred Hansen. Approval was granted to arrange construction contracts.
- 1948 On December 26, Governor Dale opened Mt. Sunapee's facilities including a 3300-foot single chairlift to the summit of North Peak, a 1000-foot rope tow and a 300-foot rope tow, base lodge, summit shelter and parking lot for 300 cars. The chairlift served three ski trails--Flying Goose, Hansen-Chase, and Chipmunk. They were the first graded and seeded trails to appear in any ski area.
- 1949 Cut the long, 1-1/2 mile Beck Brook novice trail, an alternate route to Hansen-Chase and regraded an eroded section of Chipmunk. Developed picnic areas at base and summit.
- 1951 Constructed large deck around North Peak summit house. Erected 1000-foot rope tow under chairlift. Started study of Johnson Bowl for future T-Bar.
- 1952 Accomplished considerable landscaping around Base Lodge and parking lot. Built part of Skyway Slope in Johnson Bowl and moved rope tow from under the chairlift to the lower part of this slope.
- 1953 Opened 2500-foot Summit T-Bar, Skyway Slope, cafeteria-shelter, and trail leading to and from this new area on the northeast side of the summit. Base parking lot enlarged to accommodate 450 cars.
- 1954 Cutting, grading and seeding of South Slope at t-bar and revisions to Beck Brook. Operational study by Charles M. Evans Associates, Management Engineers.
- 1956 Hansen-Chase Trail widened.
- 1957 Pomalift erected on big tow slope. Five acre Duckling Slope cut and graded and rope tow erected. A new cafeteria building was erected near the pomalift and rope tow. It was intended to be used only on weekends but was not finished in time to be used during the 57-58 season.

- 1958 New cafeteria building equipped and used daily. During the summer months it was rented frequently as a shelter for outings.
- 1960 New parking lot constructed east of cafeteria. Workshop and garage constructed at the east end of this new lot. Elliot T-Bar constructed serving an extended Duckling Slope and a new slope called Elliot.
- 1961 Original bond issue of \$375,000 paid off.
- 1962 Summit double chair constructed serving four new graded trails. Duckling double chair and Sunny J-Bar constructed. New two-story base lodge opened. New telephone system installed.
- 1963 Extensive land acquisition between base of mountain and beach entrance. Summit house constructed. Food and gifts concessioned. North Peak single chair converted to double. Conversion of Summit chair to gondola system unsuccessful. No summer lift operation.
- 1964 Lagoon-type sewage system developed for base area. New four-lane entrance road, third parking lot, and improvements to beach road, parking, and landscaping. Gondola conversion still unsuccessful. North Peak chairlift operated in summer.
- 1965 Province double chairlift constructed serving twenty acres of new, novice slopes. The Mueller Company was retained to perfect the gondola system. The North Peak chair operated during the summer.
- 1966 The Summit Gondola opened on May 28.
- 1967 The Northeast double chair, a paved road to it, and 26 acres of new slopes opened in the Johnson Bowl.
- 1969 Storage building constructed for summit chairs during the summer and gondola cars and snow vehicles during the winter.
- 1982 Snowmaking installed to the summit during summer with capability of covering 6 of 24 trails at cost of \$2 million.
- 1985 New pony lift (J-Bar) installed at Province Area. Also \$600,000 snowmaking expansion to cover 3 of 5 trails at Province Area.
- 1987 Three triple chairs constructed. The old North Peak Chair replaced and relocated 400 yds north; Summit Chair replaced and relocated 400 yards south; the crossing of the two lifts was eliminated. The Spruce Triple Chair was added just north of the old Duckling Chair. Underground power was installed and the first parking lot was resurfaced. Billy Goat Trail cut from new Spruce Chair.