

LITTLE ANNIE
(W.R.N.F.)

This area just south of Aspen Mountain suffered a fate similar to Marble's (see my "History of the Marble Ski Area" of April, 1993) and the sequence of events was nearly identical.

The original L.A. development was proposed by Waddill "Waddy" Catchings of Aspen in 1960 shortly after Aspen Highlands and Buttermilk Mountain started operating. Waddy's proposal covered the Annie and Hurricane Basins on the west-facing slopes of Castle Creek up to the top of the Richmond Hill ridge as shown on the small panoramic photo of 12/13/57. Waddy was in the process of negotiating the purchase and/or leasing of several mining patents in the vicinity of the Little Annie Mine and the Midnight Mine in Queens Gulch. (See the attached 1":2000' scale map sections from my 1966 feasibility report).

Catchings in 1960 was in his mid-forties and originally came from New York City. He moved to Aspen in 1950 where he owned income property, taught skiing for two years on Aspen Mountain and he was active in the Music Associates group and the summer music festival at Aspen. He died at age 78 in October, 1993.

On November 28, 1960, Aspen district ranger Neil Edstrom and I met with Waddy and his attorney Clint Stewart who was also secretary for the Buttermilk Mountain Skiing Corp. A summary of the planning, etc. work done by Waddy was presented and discussed. Briefly, his plan was to build a gondola lift (5500' hor. and 600' vert.) from near the Castle Creek road into Annie Basin and then a chair lift (3300'x1200') to the top of the ridge at approximately 11,400' elevation. One of the access lifts being considered was the "aerial bus" similar to the installation at Custer, South Dakota during the early 1960's (see attached photo page and also the "Aspen Mountain" chronology for more information). Edstrom and I agreed to tour the area during the 1960-61 winter even though I had skied both basins on April 10, 1960 with Darcy Brown and Harold "Red" Rowland of the Aspen Skiing Corp. Waddy then filed, on December 20, 1960, a special use application covering the Little Annie or west side of the area, and several days later I prepared a report covering all of the above.

In 1961 a preliminary development plan was prepared for Catchings and his Little Annie Development Corp. Waddy, Fritz Benedict and Robert Craig (later replaced by Dick Wright) were the original incorporators. This plan was submitted by Charles Dwyer, at that time a ski lift and tramway engineer with the firm of Ketchum-Konkel-Hastings in Denver, and who was formerly with the Heron Engineering Company (ski lifts), and E.G. Constam (T-Bar designer). Several years later Dwyer was hired by the Forest Service as their national tramway engineer. Other Aspenites that were interested in Waddy's proposal included Frank Willoughby (Midnight Mining Co. president), Henry Stein and the Bank of Aspen.

In October, 1962 a permit was issued to L.A.D.C. for ski touring and studies, similar to the procedure used at Snowmass. In the fall of 1965 another plan was prepared by Waddy with the help of Fritz Benedict and Fred Hendy, and meetings were held with the Small Business Administration re a development loan. A few months later Catchings discussed the proposal with Paul Nitze, chairman of the board of the Aspen Skiing Corp., but the corporation was not interested in getting involved financially or otherwise even though they had indicated some interest in expanding from the top of Aspen Mountain on to the slope and bowls on the east or Roaring Fork side of Richmond Hill.

In June, 1966 I prepared a detailed feasibility report for the Regional and Washington offices of the Forest Service showing an enlarged proposal to add the east-northeast slopes of Richmond Hill as shown on the attached map section. I recommended approval and issuance of a 30-year term permit after specified requirements were met and in spite of the obvious access and high cost of development problems. The area was approved for development in November, 1966.

The L.A.D.C., unable to interest enough major investors and obtain the required financing during the five years from 1967 to 1971, finally called it quits and the case was closed by the Forest Service in October, 1972.

Then, in 1975, David Farny, also of Aspen, presented a new proposal and Sno-Engineering prepared a different - from Catchings'- but preliminary development plan with access from the Roaring Fork side and the base area on

James Smith's North Star Ranch two miles southeast of Aspen. This area was also going to be the finish for a new race training trail (from the top of Aspen Mountain and the "North Star" ski trail) proposed in 1964 by the "Aspen Olympic Training Foundation" but never materialized even though a special use permit was issued and some minor clearing was started.

Farny's final plan moved the base of the access lift (a 3.6 mile long "dog-leg" gondola) to the southeast corner of the Aspen city limits near the Ute Cemetery. All of which resulted in more meetings, studies, pro and con controversies, etc., involving all segments of the Aspen and Pitkin County population. This was summarized in the Forest Service's Final Environmental Impact Statement (F.E.I.S.) of August, 1981, that recommended the issuance of a special use permit for the proposed development. Two years later "Farny's Folly", as one Aspen critic called it, was dead. (See attachments for maps, F.E.I.S. "Abstract" page and clippings). At the present time (1994), the area is a "battle ground" for two snowcat powder tour operations, snowmobilers, and back country skiers, all further complicated by the intermingled private land (several hundred acres of mining patents) mostly on the west side and national forest land mostly on the east side as shown on the 1/2":1 mile scale map.

Farny, while he was still a ski instructor at Aspen, purchased the Skyline Ranch several miles southwest of Telluride and adjacent to Highway 145 for a boy's camp in 1969. Also, as I recall, he worked for Joe Zoline on ski trails during the early development of the Telluride Ski Area. (See Telluride area monograph)

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