

As for us, we didn't think it was unusual for a man to stand there all day and run his creaky engine on his own pasture with his own rope and his own gasoline so that we could learn to ski. We thought that that was the way of the world.

We know now how wrong we were.

Some days, the gas engine would have problems, and then Harold Farr would hitch up a rope directly to the power drive of his farm tractor. We were much in favor of this, because the tractor was stronger; it could move more kids more quickly to the top of the hill. And when he had a ropeful of big, strong skiers, Farr would touch the tractor accelerator a little, and his eyes would twinkle even more as the youngsters sped upwards, exulting.

Once you got up to the top of Farr's Hill, there were generally two ways down. If you were accomplished or foolhardy, you started directly down, on the steepest part of the hill, gingerly watching for the spots where ice usually built up and turning carefully until you dared to take a straight run to the bottom. If you were younger, you took a track southward, along the top of the hill, trotted out your newly learned snowplow turn ever so slowly and carefully, and headed back on a diagonal to the main part of the hill. Specifically, you headed toward the enormous elm perched a third of the way up the hill. Once you were there, it was easy coasting.

My mother, who didn't ski but thought parents should be with their children, ventured down Farr's Hill only once. Not knowing any better, she pointed her skis over the top and skied straight down, without a turn. She survived.

There were other routes for the experts to ply. The Ledges, a rocky, gully-ridden jumble on the north side of the rope could be negotiated if you could make two quick turns in exactly the right places and ride out the bumps with your knees. Making The Ledges skiable, of course, required Farr to cut his fences in a couple more places. The fences were cut.

And there was the ultimate challenge: straight down, right beside the tow, with a jump in the middle. Only a guy named Peachy Monroe could handle

that, and even 30 years later his name shines in my memory for the feat, though it remains unaccompanied by any other biographical data.

During many of the years when Harold Farr operated his ski tow, lessons were given by Eben Brown of South Royalton. Thanks to "Brownie" and Farr's Hill, Randolph youngsters found themselves well prepared when they ventured out onto the more altitudinous slopes at Mad River Glen or Stowe.

In a nod to the steepness of Farr's Hill, Brownie told his young charges that if they could ski from top to bottom *under control*, they could negotiate any ski run in the state. They found him to be correct.

The *White River Valley Herald* called Farr "The father, grandfather, and great-grandfather of skiing in Randolph." For 30 years, the winter weekends and vacations of many Randolph youngsters were spent speeding down his hill, or trying to bump each other off the rope by thumping it with an elbow, or huddling into the tiny corrugated warming hut where a cast iron stove could burn your mittens brown if they touched it.

Born in the infancy of downhill skiing, Farr's Hill occupied a space in time that seems infinitely removed from today's \$30 lift tickets, million-dollar damage suits, ski areas that are really land developments, and natty outfits that change from season to season.

The passing of Farr's Hill came in 1966. Its successor, Pinnacle Ski-Ways, closed 10 years later. The big elm in the middle of the ski slope died last year and casts a skeletal shadow over the hill. Eben Brown died October 4, 1986. Harold Farr himself died on a Tuesday last December at age 90.

It is not easy to be consoled.

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