

**Wayne Poulsen**  
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One of the West's most extraordinary, courageous and influential ski pioneers, Wayne Poulsen, was known for the initial development of Squaw Valley. His love of skiing and determination to develop a ski resort in Squaw Valley eventually led to America's first winter Olympic Games. His real passion, however, was not just to develop a world class ski area, but to share his love of the mountains with his family and friends -- guiding them to his favorite fishing spots; hiking, camping and riding with them in the back country in summer, and, of course, skiing in the winter.

Poulsen's life was deeply embedded in skiing. From ski mountaineering as a youth, he went on to become a national class jumper, one of the Far West's outstanding four event skiers and a college ski coach who led his team to two national championships. One of the most diversified and talented skiers of his time, he excelled in all the varied dimensions of the sport -- a rarity in this age of specialization.

For young Wayne Poulsen, skiing began in 1926 in Reno, Nevada, when at eleven years old, he made his first pair of skis of Oregon pine in a carpentry shop. They were seven feet long, four inches wide with home-made bindings, tips bent into shovel shape after softening in nearby Steamboat Hot Springs. With his characteristic enthusiasm, he made several more pairs for his friends.

Summer outings with Boy Scout Troop #1 to Zephyr Cove on the shore of Lake Tahoe introduced him to camping and exploring the wilderness. While improving his skills as an outdoorsman, his love of the high mountains, lakes and streams intensified. As a Scout leader and eventually as an Eagle Scout, Poulsen climbed every major peak around Lake Tahoe and built two cabins out of lumber left over from flumes. His troop always won the state championships, Poulsen being the "fire by friction" champ. According to his son, Craig, "Dad was the only fisherman in the group, and a master pancake-maker."

Entering high school in the fall of 1930, Poulsen, a good skier with considerable outdoor experience, was chosen to be an aide to Dr. James Church, a pioneer snow scientist and a professor at the University of Nevada in Reno. Church initiated snowpack surveys to accurately predict the spring runoff vital to the agricultural industry in California. To accumulate and analyze his information, Dr. Church and young Poulsen would make an annual circuit to different areas around Lake Tahoe.

From Carson Valley, south of Reno, they climbed with skins over a pass and down to Bijou. Poulsen carried a 35 pound camera, tripod and a twelve foot tube that whistled when he skied down hill. The next day they climbed up Kingsbury Grade to study "snow courses", then down to a valley between Freel's Peak and Heavenly Valley where they spent the night in a corrugated iron cabin. Returning to Bijou, they caught the mail boat to Camp Richardson, climbed up to Fallen Leaf Lake to rendezvous with the caretaker who boated them across that lake to the lodge. From there they skied back into Desolation Valley.

Poulsen liked everything about skiing. He and his friend, Marty Arrouge, jumped from snow ramps they built in Truckee Meadows, north of Reno, soon graduating to a

bigger jump at Galena Summit near Mt. Rose. At sixteen Poulsen tried the jump at Hirschdale, where landing one in four was considered pretty good. Poulsen landed four in a row. That feat inspired Poulsen and Arrouge to go try the scaffold jump at Hilltop in Truckee -- a serious jump hill. Skiing on ash skis with a broken tip, he managed to land four more jumps. (A short outrun ended in the Truckee River for those who couldn't negotiate the sharp turn at the end. Allegedly, Poulsen never went into the river except once to retrieve his skis.)

Poulsen entered his first competition at the 1931 divisional championships on Olympic Hill in Tahoe City. Although he didn't place in his class C division, he saw the big boys jump. It was the tryout for the 1932 Olympic Team, and he got a taste of the thrill of soaring above Lake Tahoe, where the previous year Alf and Sverre Engen were photographed in a double jump, clasping hands in mid-air.

At the 1932 National Ski Jumping Championships in Tahoe City, Poulsen placed third in the junior division. The winner of that meet, Roy Mikkelson, along with five other Norwegians had left Lake Placid in New York to work for Wendell Robie (founder and president of the Auburn Ski Club) at his lumber mill in Auburn. Mikkelson, twice US National Ski Jumping Champion and a member of the US Olympic Team from 1932-1936, was an inspiration and a mentor for Poulsen and many of the California skiers.

While traveling from Truckee to Tahoe City for ski meets, Poulsen often looked west at the mountains rising above what appeared to be a great valley, wondering what was there. Marty Arrouge had camped in this valley with his father, a Basque shepherd, who grazed his flocks there in the summers. In the summer of 1931, Arrouge took Wayne into the valley to fish in a trout filled stream that meandered through an immense green meadow surrounded by granite peaks.

It was called Squaw Valley.

The following summer Poulsen returned for another look, but was turned back by a gun toting cowboy from the Smith Ranch.. On the way out, he caught his limit of 25 trout from Squaw Creek. The next day he returned, got a better look, and caught another limit.

Poulsen entered the University of Nevada at Reno in fall, 1933. In January of the following winter of 1934, the first ski tournament in the history of the San Francisco Bay Area took place on a scaffold erected at the head of Hearst Avenue on the University of California campus in Berkeley. Just like "Big Game Weekend", 50,000 people crowded as close to the jump as they could get, with another estimated 50,000 fighting for every available vantage point to see seven of California's best class A and eight class B jumpers soar above the crowd of awed spectators. To add to the thrill, Rolf Wigaard of Auburn Ski Club made the longest standing jump of the day (31 meters), beating his teammate and national champion, Roy Mikkelson. With just enough points on style, however, Roy emerged the victor. Halvor Mikkelson won the class B with Hans Haldorsen second, Olaf Blodger third and Poulsen sixth.

Along with the team of Norwegian champions, Poulsen participated in jumping exhibitions at Oakland and Los Angeles Stadiums with leaps of 65 feet and dicey landings on Hawaiian grass mats.

In January of the following year, 1935, Poulsen and his fellow teammates in the Auburn Ski Club filled seven freight cars with snow at Cisco Grove and shipped it by train to Berkeley, where it was firmly packed on the 170 foot wooden scaffold that took

off from "Tightwad Hill" overlooking the site of the present University of California stadium. Intended to stimulate interest in winter sports, the event was sanctioned by the California Ski Association (now Far West Ski Association) and attracted competitors from Chicago, Oregon, Los Angeles, Hollywood and all the local California mountain communities. As usual, the Mikkelson brothers won class A and B respectively. Both Poulsen and Arrouge fell on their fist jumps, taking them out of the running for points, although Poulsen's second jump was the third longest in Class B. The crowd was estimated to be 13,000, but only 3,000 paid -- a big loss for the sponsoring Auburn Ski Club.

In February of that same year, the California Ski Championships were held at Cisco, and 161 entrants competed in seven classes over three days in jumping, cross country and slalom. In a large and very competitive Class B, Poulsen took fourth in jumping.

About that time, Alpine skiing was coming into its own. The first alpine Olympics were held in Garmisch in 1936, resulting in worldwide interest in both nordic and alpine skiing. Poulsen took to alpine skiing just as he had to nordic skiing, racing in every kind of competition that came along (once he even ran a long-board race). As a college junior, he organized the university's first ski team, becoming both captain and coach. He also conceived the university's first winter carnival and with the help of many able volunteers, organized that event which included the California Four-Way Championship (slalom, downhill, jumping and cross country), which Poulsen won. Later in the season, he led the ski team to win the Pacific Coast Inter-collegiate Championship.

In the summer of 1937, Poulsen -- a young man of 22 -- took an option on 1200 acres of the Smith Ranch in Squaw Valley, convinced that he would make his life there -- build a home and perhaps a ski resort.

Graduating from the University with a BA in Business Administration in spring of 1938, Poulsen started his first ski area at Grass Lake (now known as Sky Tavern) on Mt. Rose, with a rope tow, ski school, restaurant and ski shop. He continued coaching the university ski team, leading them to win their second Pacific Coast Championship and onward and upward to win the 1939 National Collegiate Championships in Yosemite.

The winter of 1939-40 World War II ignited in Europe, but that seemed far away from the Sierra Nevada. His friend Marty Arrouge left Reno to join the Sun Valley ski school and found himself teaching Irving Thalberg, son of the movie star Norma Shearer. Meanwhile, Poulsen booked himself into a jumping exhibition at the San Francisco World's Fair. When a scheduled team from Utah failed to show, Poulsen filled in by making three additional jumps. On the first jump, he sprained an ankle, taped it, jumped again and sprained the other ankle. Demonstrating a degree of determination, he taped the other ankle and jumped four more times, breaking his leg on the final jump.

During the summer months, Arrouge worked for the US Army Airforce as a flight instructor at an Arizona air base. He advised Poulsen that with the US being pulled slowly into World War II, unless he wanted to be in the ski troops, he had better learn to fly. Poulsen took lessons at the airport in Reno and discovered his second passion -- flying.

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, drawing the US into World War II, Poulsen knew it would be a matter of time until he had to go into the service. He decided to sign up for Great Britain's Royal Air Force to fight the German Luftwaffe over

England. When he was told he would have to wait to be called for training, he called Arrouge and found he could join Pfeifer's ski school in Sun Valley -- where Arrouge was busy courting Norma Shearer.

The ski school co-director, Otto Lang, assigned Poulsen to be a private instructor for Stavros Niarchos, the well known Greek shipping magnate. Gambling every night at the Christiania casino in Ketchum appealed to Niarchos much more than getting out on the ski hill in the morning, so he rarely showed up before afternoon classes. This left Poulsen's mornings paid for, but with no one to teach -- but not for long.

Frustrated by winter vacations on the often-icy slopes at the Lake Placid, Gladys Olga Alexandra Kunau ("Sandy" to her friends), who lived with her parents in the Sherry Netherland Hotel of Fifth Avenue in New York City, asked Betty Harriman, her classmate at Miss Hewitt's school in Manhattan, where else could she ski?

The answer was Sun Valley, of course. It was owned by Union Pacific Railroad, of which Betty's uncle Averell was chairman. The ski resort had been started at his insistence. When Sandy saw the movie, Sun Valley Serenade, directed by Otto Lang in Sun Valley, she booked a reservation for the month of February.

Once there, Otto Lang suggested she take free lessons on Niarchos' time with Wayne Poulsen. Inevitably, they fell in love and were engaged the following spring.

The US Navy Air Force appeared to be Poulsen's best bet for service, so he joined as an instructor and was assigned to the Army Air Force base at Twenty Nine Palms, California.

In order for Wayne and Sandy to be married before Wayne had to report for service, Marty Arrouge and Norma Shearer postponed their own wedding for a week so that Sandy and Wayne could be married during the second week of August, 1942 with the reception at the home of Marty Arrouge and Norma Shearer. Soon after, on August 24, Marty and Norma were married in Hollywood.

In 1943, Poulsen went to work for Pan American Airlines, requisitioned by the Army to fly supplies to the battlegrounds of the Pacific. He flew ammunition and men into Iwo Jima, Wake Island and Guadalcanal -- a hazardous duty, as transport planes were often targets.

Poulsen survived, and continued to fly for Pan Am for thirty one years.

At last he had the income to purchase 640 acres in Squaw Valley where the original lodge and the first lift were constructed. Wisely, he postponed exercising the option he already had on 1200 acres.

Whenever he was on leave, he and Sandy and their growing family came to their valley. In the summer, they drove along the road as far as they could, often getting stuck in the mud while attempting to cross the creek. Many times they forded the creek on foot and hiked the rest of the way in to a grove of aspen trees by the creek at the base of the mountain. Here, they spent the summer at home in a tent.

In winter they skied in about five miles, took off their boots and pants to wade the icy waters of Squaw Creek and then climbed the mountain on skins. Poulsen worked out a master plan, sighting lifts and runs, imagining how the vast virgin slopes would look with skiers descending in all directions. One of these slopes was so steep and the snow so heavy, that Sandy made 22 kick turns before reaching the bottom. Wayne thereupon gave the mountain the name it still has -- KT-22.

When the war in the Pacific ended in August, 1945, Poulsen continued to fly for Pan Am, pioneering air routes over China, Burma, Malaysia and India. After the Communists took over China in 1947, he flew some of the last western diplomats out of Peking (now Beijing)..

In 1947 the Poulsens started construction on their first home at Christy Hill in Squaw Valley. Rocks for the fireplace were rolled down Shirley Canyon, loaded on the tailgate of the family station wagon and transported over rough terrain to the site. They filled an oil barrel by submerging it in the creek, carrying that also on the tailgate to the house where they mixed cement. The only plumbing was a pink portable toilet called Petunia.

Winter came too soon for the Poulsens. With no glass in their windows, and snow blowing through the house, Sandy cooked the first Christmas dinner in the fireplace.

This was their land and they were home.

Now living year around in the valley, the Poulsens began to actively seek investors to develop their resort. They bought an army surplus weasel, named it the "Clipper Reindeer" (after the famous Pan Am Clippers) and invited friends, Olympic skiers, pilots and fishing buddies to see their valley. They had a lot of fun, but no one offered to invest.. The next winter, in 1948, they found an investor.

They met Alex Cushing, an East Coast lawyer, while skiing at Alta, Utah. He expressed an interest in buying a ranch in California, and the Poulsens invited him to come and take a look at their valley. After being towed across the meadow behind the "Clipper Reindeer", Cushing and his wife, Justine, gathered several of their East Coast friends and collectively raised \$400,000 (including \$50,000 from Lawrence Rockefeller) in return for a majority share of the Squaw Valley Development Company -- with Poulsen as president. Poulsen contributed his 640 acres at the head of the valley, and kept for himself the 1200 acres on which he now exercised the option -- eleven years after taking it out. Having known and loved Squaw Valley for over a decade, Poulsen had a deep emotional bond with the land. He favored a cautious approach to development. Cushing, on the other hand, considered an investment. He had another agenda, another approach and different goals. They were both strong willed, determined men, and inevitably, the two disagreed on just about everything. To support his growing family, Poulsen was still flying for Pan Am and was away much of the time. In October 1949, while Poulsen was out of the country, Cushing called a stockholders meeting and took over as president. Poulsen was out of the Ski Corporation, but he still owned the floor of the valley. On Thanksgiving Day of that year, the new lodge and one lift opened to the public. Emile Allais was the ski school director.

In 1950 to 1953, the Korean War erupted and Poulsen made frequent flights to Seoul. During the years 1958 to 1960, he pioneered the first trans polar flights, culminating in 1960 when he made the first flight over the North Pole from San Francisco to Paris.

In the early 1950s, a series of disasters struck Squaw Valley. Avalanches knocked out lift towers on three separate occasions; the lodge flooded twice, and in 1956 it burned to the ground. Toward the end of the 1950s, things in the valley began to change: With the backing of the State of California, encouragement from ski school director, Joe Marillac (who personally convinced the F.I.S. that the slopes of Squaw were technically qualified to hold an international competition), and a legendary public relations coup by

Cushing, Squaw Valley won its bid for the 1960 Olympic Games -- by two votes, over Innsbruck.

The valley became a scene of feverish preparation as workers arrived to build the infrastructure for the Games. The State acquired some of Poulsen's acres by eminent domain, but more important, their precious meadow was threatened by irreversible environmental damage. About 150 acres were to be paved over for parking, and a sewer plant, with open sludge beds, was planned for the south side of the valley. It took a long, costly and lonely battle against the state, the county and the Olympic Organizing Committee to prevent this. In the end, the sewer plant was not built, and the State used snow-cats to compact snow mixed with sawdust, and it worked fine. The meadow was saved.

The Squaw Valley Olympics was universally acclaimed as one of the best Olympics ever. The sun shone on perfect snow conditions from the opening to the closing ceremonies. Both spectators and athletes still remember the intimacy of the valley, where everything was in walking distance, and competitors from all nations lived, ate and attended the competitions together.

In 1968, with the election of Lyndon Johnson as President, the Vietnam war began to escalate, and Poulsen found himself flying rockets into Saigon. So lethal was his cargo, that he had to park far from the terminal in order to avoid blowing up the entire airport should a stray bomb fall his way. On his last flight out, only half the city remained in American hands.

It was in December the next year, that Poulsen had the closest call of his flying career. He was taking off from Sydney Australia, piloting one of the first 707s scheduled to fly to Hawaii when a flock of seagulls hit the engines. Poulsen felt the plane lose power and instantly applied full brakes and full reverse engines, and though the plane crashed the barrier at the end of the runway, Poulsen brought 125 grateful passengers and 11 crew members to a safe stop in a muddy swamp -- saved by his split-second reaction.

Through the 1960s, the Poulsens slowly began to develop their land into a mountain community, setting aside parcels for public purposes. The meadow became grazing land for cattle and horses running free after a days' work in the stables. They built Papoose, a children's ski area next to the Olympic jump where all eight Poulsen children and many future Olympians carved their first turns in the annual "Easter Bunny Race." Four Poulsen children were on the US National Team, and two (Eric and Sandra) were on the 1972 Olympic team.

In 1974, after a career that had few equals among commercial airline pilots, Wayne Poulsen retired from Pan Am, and five years later they built their dream house, facing across the meadow toward Squaw Peak. It became the scene of family weddings, birthdays and anniversaries as their children grew up, married and had kids, bringing fourteen grandchildren into the fold.

A few years ago, Wayne contracted a virulent form of Parkinson's and was told last year he would soon be totally paralyzed. This vital, active, humorous, playful and loving man did not want to live on those terms. Last March, at 79 he took his own life.

On hearing of his father's death, the youngest Poulsen, Russell, wrote to his mother from Paris, "Did he know that I respected him, and considered him my ideal in character, my mentor, my rock, my home, my true north?"

During the Memorial Service at the Queen of the Snows Church in Squaw Valley, his son Craig said, "The essence of his dreams were never compromised. He knew in his heart what really mattered -- his passions, his family and his friends. He never measured his life by the milestones he achieved. Ultimately, he measured his life by the experiences he had and the friends and family that he shared those experiences with. There was always room for a friend at his hearth and a child on his knee!"

Sandy and their children: Chris, Wayne Jr., Lance, Eric, Sandra, Craig, Glen, Russell and 14 grandchildren filled the front rows of the church, and friends from all over the West -- California, Nevada, Idaho, Colorado, the East and even Europe overflowed down the steps into the street outside. Many among them had known the High Sierra when there were no lifts. After the service, they greeted one another with long embraces, sharing recollections of adventures with Wayne on skis and on horseback -- hiking, camping, fishing or flying with him. Everyone there had been touched by Wayne in some way, even if only to live in this valley and to love this place as he did.