

Ski Museums of the World

A guide to ski museums and collections
in 22 countries around the world.

By E. John B. Allen

Of the 130 nations that belong to the Fédération Internationale de Ski (FIS), 22 have established museums that focus on the history of skiing. Some are entirely devoted to skiing; some are part of a small, local museum; others are simply one section within a broader collection of folk material. A few are private collections you can visit by appointment. The dozens of ski museums and libraries in this global guide are not all of a kind—but for skiers and snowboarders interested in the rich heritage of what we now call snowsports, any would merit a visit.

Skis were on public view as early as 1655, and the first dedicated ski museum was founded in Norway in 1923. Now in its 96th year, it remains in the same area—at the base of the mighty Holmenkollen ski jump, bordering Oslo’s own skiing grounds, the Nordmarka. But the vast majority of ski museums are post-World War II creations, many initiated by individuals like Theodor Hüttenegger in Müzzzuschlag, Austria, and Gilbert Merlin in Grenoble, France. In the United States, ski museums were often started by individuals but then, in an effort to raise money, were transformed into Halls of Fame. American museums are all private ventures, although some receive minor government funding at the local, regional or national level.

Ski heritage and its preservation rely heavily on specialized libraries, many of them an integral part of a museum. Others are beholden to an institution of learning, such as the library of the Deutsche



The world’s oldest ski museum was founded in 1923 by architect Hjalmar Welhaven and built at Frogneseier, near the entry to Oslo’s winter skiing region of Nordmarka. It moved to its current location at the base of the Holmenkollen jump in 1951.

Sporthochschule, the German Sports University in Cologne. Other leading resources include the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and its massive Olympic museum in Lausanne, Switzerland. Over the years, FIS has sponsored a half-dozen conferences on the history of skiing.

From amassing “a bunch of old stuff” in the early days, ski museums have made significant progress in recent years with computerized collection management and archival treatments of wood and cloth, film and photographs, documents and art. The digital or virtual museum—an online collection of photos and documents—is the latest trend: At the moment, the Austrian Olympic Committee’s museum and Luzi Hitz’ and Pierre Schneider’s Swiss History of Skiing are the two standouts. This growing sophistication requires major financial support. Europeans have to persuade their municipalities, county and national governments to send Euros in their direction, while Americans try hard to increase membership to finance and improve their museums and libraries.

Over the past 43 years, I have visited many ski-related museums; for an historian, there is nothing like seeing the actual artifacts. Many of the museums have specialized libraries and these resources are invaluable for anyone interested in following the old ski tracks. So it was a natural project for me to publish a list for other interested parties.

The list, last updated in 2012, had 119 entries; this new one contains more than 160—the latest addition being the archive of the Ski Club of Great Britain that was added to the Special Collections of De Montfort University in Leicester in February 2018. Meanwhile, a half-dozen museums are waiting in the wings or in storage. One museum, Morgedal’s Norske Skieventyr, closed for the winter 2018–19 and was open for the summer months of 2019, and the Swiss Sports Museum is “in liquidation” as of May 2019.

As ski travelers and students of ski history, I hope you will find the guide to be useful. But be warned: Some of the information came from websites or e-mail correspondence, and information can quickly change. It is always wise to contact the museum ahead of a visit.