



MARJORIE PERRY: NATURALIST, OUTDOORSWOMAN, CONSERVATIONIST

Love of the Great Outdoors

Marjorie Perry was born in 1883 in Chicago, the daughter of affluent parents Samuel and Lottie Perry. Like so many other families at that time, the Perrys moved to Denver because of Mrs. Perry's asthma condition. Marjorie was three years old when the family moved into the residence at 1190 Grant Street close to downtown Denver.

Mr. Perry was involved in several business concerns, most notably mining, and was a friend of railroad pioneer David Moffat. The two would play billiards together and visited each other's homes frequently. Samuel Perry owned a mine near Steamboat Springs, and was involved in planning the famous 6.2 mile Moffat Tunnel, which was constructed through the mountains from the east portal 50 miles outside of Denver to the west portal near present day Winter Park.



*Marjorie Perry (left) with her brother & parents in Oak Creek, CO circa 1909
photo courtesy Tread of Pioneers Museum
Steamboat Springs, CO*



Marjorie Perry (front left) aboard David Moffat's railroad car. Photo courtesy Tread of Pioneers Museum

Marjorie attended Denver Public Schools, including the Manual Training High School, completing the last year of her college preparation in Chicago. Upon her graduation as a mathematics major from Smith College, she returned to her beloved Colorado. She loved going with her father wherever he went, including hunting trips in the high country. Often they would ride the train to the mountains in Mr. Moffat's private railroad car.

Early on, Marjorie identified with the beautiful Rocky Mountains and the great outdoors, preferring hunting trips and horseback rides with her father to the "high society" life in the city. She accompanied her father on week-long bear hunting trips in the mountains, and rode horseback with him all around Denver. Many times, she rode 200 miles between Denver and Steamboat Springs, where she lived for part of the year.

In 1913, younger sister Charlotte began to look for a location for what would become the Perry-Mansfield Camp for girls. This summer camp would be dedicated to theater and dance pursuits. Mr. Perry's mine, the Moffat Coal Company, was located just outside Steamboat Springs in nearby Oak Creek. Being familiar with the area, he showed Charlotte the lovely valley that he thought would be well-suited for the camp, and Charlotte agreed. The camp opened for the season the following year.

Marjorie, having no interest in either theater or dance, but wanting to be involved, built a cabin near the camp, and helped out by teaching riding lessons and taking the campers on trail rides and wilderness pack trips.

“Crossing the Rockies Astride in 1926”

One account of the ride from Steamboat Springs to Denver was written by close friend Eleanor Bliss, who accompanied Marjorie on the adventure in October, 1926.

Eleanor described the provisions that the two women packed for the arduous 6-day trip. “Besides heavy gloves, sweaters, windbreakers and slickers tied on the backs of our saddles, we each had one saddle pocket full of lunch and little bags full of nuts, raisins and hunks of cheese for emergencies.” Each had a small canvas bag of personal items and medical provisions, as well as saddlebags of oats for the horses. They stayed the first night at Marjorie’s father’s mine, the Moffat Coal Company. Other nights were spent at the ranch houses of friends, and one night in a hotel in Kremmling. During one stay at a ranch near Williams Fork, they taught an entire family how to braid bridles like the ones they had made for their horses. Their horses and braided bridles were admired by many people wherever they went.

The fourth day, the women woke to snowfall, which continued all day. They enlisted the help of a rancher to guide them over Jones’ Pass, because they couldn’t see the trail in the snow. Conditions worsened through the day, with freezing sleet and deep drifts to cut through. Eleanor said, “The horses kept wanting to turn back, and we had to keep their noses in the trail and urge them at every step.” Finally, they descended to the base of Berthoud Pass, and out of the worst of the storm, in the late afternoon.

The morning of the fifth day, it was still snowing, but it cleared in the afternoon. That night was spent at Marjorie’s ski hut on Lookout Mountain, 20 miles from Denver. The sixth and last day was one of “whizzing automobiles and concrete roads” but Eleanor and Marjorie were relieved that “at least we had ridden the 200 miles from Steamboat Springs over Gore Pass and Jones’ Pass to Denver in a blizzard without killing either our horses or ourselves.” In closing, Eleanor stated “it was a ride I shall never forget.”



*Marjorie Perry on her way to the mountain cabin she called “Lunatic Lodge” in Routt County, CO
Photo courtesy Tread of Pioneers Museum.*

The Birth of Skiing as Sport in Colorado

Marjorie rode with her father on the train when he traveled to the mountains to help in planning the Moffat Tunnel. In 1913, on one of these trips, the train stopped at Hot Sulphur Springs. Marjorie heard that a small Norwegian man was going to demonstrate ski jumping that afternoon. That man was Carl Howelsen, later known as the father of Colorado ski jumping, and for whom a ski jump at Steamboat Ski Area is named. Marjorie got off the train to watch the event, and was so taken with the sport that she persuaded Howelsen to come to Steamboat Springs, where the hills were steeper and the snow deeper. When he saw the area, Howelsen, nicknamed “The Flying Norseman,” exclaimed that he was sure he could break the ski jump record there. The next year, Howelsen brought in skiers from Norway, and the annual Winter Carnival in Steamboat Springs began. Marjorie attended every carnival from then until her death, missing just one in 1935 due to an injury she suffered while riding her beloved horse, Gypsy.



Ski jumping during the 1914 Winter Carnival on Woodchuck Hill. Photo courtesy Tread of Pioneers Museum



Ladies 1/4 mile race. Marjorie Perry (right) finished second. Photo courtesy Tread of Pioneers Museum

At a time when most people perceived skiing as a mode of transportation, Marjorie thought of it as an enjoyable winter sport. She was a friend and companion to the Scandinavian ski jumpers touring the West, hosting some at her own cabin and arranging for others to stay at the homes of her many friends.



Marjorie Perry in Winter Carnival cross-country race, circa 1914. Photo courtesy Tread of Pioneers Museum

Carl Howelsen lived in Steamboat Springs year-round, working as a bricklayer when he wasn't ski jumping. He taught the local children, some of them as young as 3 or 4 years old, to ski. The children would go home and practice on their rooftops, which were piled high with deep snow. He handcrafted a pair of 8-foot wooden skis for Marjorie, which she used when she accompanied the Norwegians on cross country pack trips and visits to the local hot springs. Once, when stranded on a snowbound train on Rollins Pass, she skied down the tracks, flare in hand, to lead the snowplow train to the rescue. The skis were later donated to the ski museum in Steamboat Springs. Marjorie finally retired from the sport in 1968, one year before she died, at age 86.

For her contributions to the fledgling sport of skiing in Colorado, Marjorie Perry was posthumously inducted into the Colorado Ski Hall of Fame in 1988.



Marjorie Perry on horseback pulling skiers in Steamboat Springs. Photo courtesy Tread of Pioneers Museum

Lofty Ambition

Marjorie Perry's younger sister, Charlotte, kidded that Marjorie could have made something of herself if she had had any ambition. Marjorie quipped that she did have an ambition: she wanted a cow. With this in mind, she purchased 210 acres of the Greenwood Ranch, for which Greenwood Village is named, and began farming in the 1930s. The farm extended from Colorado Boulevard to Holly Street, and from Orchard Road to Bellevue Avenue. She designed her house and had it built in 1936. This land, which she called "The Preserve," was Marjorie's sanctuary, where she could live peacefully with her beloved animals and enjoy nature. She bought the acreage in pieces, purchasing adjacent parcels whenever they became available. Marjorie divided her time between this farm and her land in Steamboat Springs, where she spent each summer.

The High Line Canal runs in a horseshoe shape through the property, and in the spring, Marjorie gathered wild asparagus, one of her favorite vegetables, along the canal and irrigation ditches. This was a real farm: there were milk cows, horses, burros, sheep, chickens ducks, geese, cats and dogs. Every Tuesday during the late fall and winter, Marjorie would deliver milk, cream and eggs to her customers, most of which were her long-time friends. Surplus cream would be delivered in 5-gallon cans to Bredan Creamery on South Broadway. In the spring she and her nephew Bob Perry would ride over 200 miles on horseback, driving cows and horses to summer pastures in Steamboat Springs.

Marjorie Perry died in 1969 at the age of 86, having lived a most active and interesting life in early Colorado. She was fondly remembered in an obituary as a "... lover of the earth and of its innocent creatures of field and forest...".



Marjorie Perry at her farm, "The Preserve" circa 1930s