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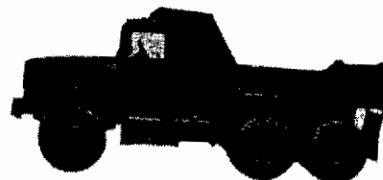
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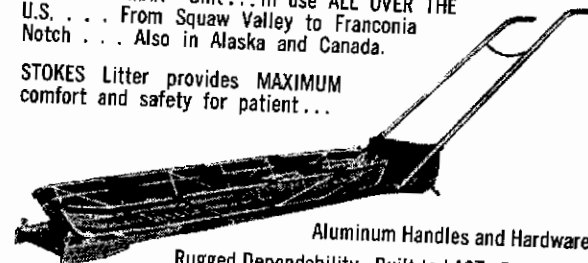
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**THE QUESTION OF MINERAL KING**

By F. D. VOORHEES

February, 1965, was a banner month for California skiers. Not only were they enjoying one of the best snow years ever, but of more importance, the Forest Service issued a prospectus for the development of the vast Mineral King area.

Under 230 road miles from the San Fernando Valley, via the Golden State Freeway and the four-lane divided highway extension to Visalia, the Mineral King valley lies at a base elevation of some 7,500 feet. Mineral King consists of eight enormous bowls with descents down north-facing slopes of 3,800 vertical feet and more. The long-term history of snowfall is impressive too. Even in the drought year of 1962-1963 Mineral King had a more-than-adequate snow pack.

Since the middle forties, Mineral King has been recognized as one of the world's greatest potential ski area sites. Such notables as Fred Iselin, Freidl Pfeiffer, Luggi Foeger and the late Hannes Schneider all eyed Mineral King as a site second to none. During the winters of 1947-1948 and 1948-1949 when the late Vicki Hasher was conducting snow and avalanche surveys in the area, Lowell Thomas spent several days skiing the bowls. His comment on the potential was: "Some day this will be the greatest in the world."

Mineral King was discovered in the late 1860's, the name deriving from the early silver miners who settled the area. Mining operations that began in the seventies never amounted to much. The area's emergence as a popular summer vacation spot was during the 1920's, and still remains a favorite recreation area. Even with a grossly substandard 25-mile-long access road the valley attracts 10,000 visitors each summer.

Poor access, which blocked Corty Hill's plans for development 15 years ago along with those of a number of others, is not the only problem, however. Avalanche hazard, one of the basic factors to be considered in the Forest

Service's current proposal evaluation, is of equal importance. In fact, it was considered so serious by the Robert Brandt group, one of the bidders, that both Monty Atwater and Ed LaChapelle were included on the consulting team of American Resort Consultants, Inc., which did the layout for Brandt.

In addition to Brandt's Mineral King Development Company, which made a presentation at the Porterville, California, bid opening on August 31 with a trailer full of models, were Walt Disney and four other groups and individuals. These were: Don Bollenbacher, Marcon Construction and Associates, Ragnar Qvales, and Raul Balderras of the Mineral King Development Corporation.

Brandt's proposal calls for an initial investment of 15 million dollars, with an ultimate cost of 40 million. The layout, involving an entire mountain community, includes all necessary facilities to support a well balanced year-around resort.

Disney is reported to be considering a total investment in the neighborhood of 35 million dollars, as is Qvales' group. With a community and mountain plan differing radically from Brandt's, Disney also proposes a self-contained mountain town. Most observers feel the contest is between Brandt and Disney. In any case, as much emphasis will be placed on summer activities as on winter.

Regardless of who receives the award, the project will be a significant factor in California economics. A Los Angeles economic research specialist reports that the resort will generate a minimum of 600 million dollars for the state. He further states that more than 2.5 million visitors will be drawn to Mineral King annually by 1976, with 800 thousand of these coming from out of state. Aggregate individual spending will be on the same scale as everything else involved with Mineral King. Visitors will spend 25 million dollars at the area and a like amount in the San Joaquin Valley.

An annual payroll of 8 million dollars received by the resort's operating staff projected at 600 permanent and from 800 to 1000 seasonal employees, is significant in any economy, even California's. The impact of guest food sales reaching 8 million return in tax, and another 2 million to be taken in through the state sales tax, all these potentials are understandably cause for the State of California to construct the essential 25-mile access road.

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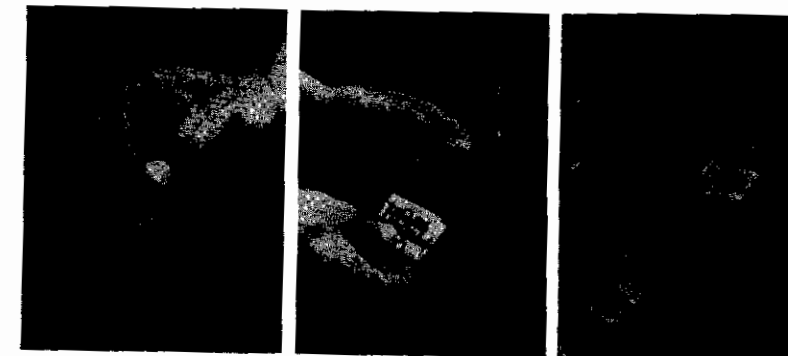
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