Former Sierra Ski Ranch owner dies at age 92

Former Sierra Ski Ranch owner Vernon Dewayne Sprock has died. He was 92.

Mr. Sprock, who was living in Bozeman, Mont., died Feb. 10.

Mr. Sprock along with his wife, Bobbie, owned and operated Sierra Ski Ranch for 40 years. In 1953, the couple took over the financially troubled ski area that is now known as Sierra-at-Tahoe.



Vern Sprock

It was here that Mr. Sprock gained his reputation as a hard worker, dreamer and innovator. Sierra Ski Ranch was located one mile down Highway 50 from its current location. Sierra was relocated in 1968 due to a proposed highway alignment that never happened.

The first year in that location was one of many challenges due to a very heavy snowfall damaging the new lodge and lifts. However, perseverance and prayer prevailed, and the obstacles were overcome to lay the groundwork for many expansions at this new location. He was an instrumental member of the B77 Code of National Ski Safety Committee for aerial tramways. The couple shared a lifetime of pioneering hardship and hard work, always working together to solve each challenge. The resort was sold in 1993 to Fibreboard Corporation. Three years later

Booth Creek acquired it and changed the name to Sierra-at-Tahoe.

Mr. Sprock was born Sept. 3, 1921, in Elk Grove to Hiejo Henry and Bertha (Stubel) Sprock. Following his graduation from Elk Grove High School, he continued to work on the family farm. While doing this he furthered his education in the engineering and surveying field. Mr. Sprock was a World War II veteran, serving in the Army in the culinary department in Texas from 1942-46.

After the war Mr. Sprock spent time with his dog as his only companion near the Tioga Pass as a trapper of marten and bear. He sold the meat and furs from the trappings to make his living. He later relocated to Tamarack Pines on Highway 50.

For a couple of winters he worked for the California Division of Highways, now known as Caltrans. In the summer months he built log cabins, doing all the work from scratch by cutting the trees, skinning the logs, and cementing them together, along with all aspects needed for a completed cabin.

Mr. Sprock met the love of his life, Barbara “Bobbie” Sprock, at Strawberry Lodge on the dance floor in 1950. They were married Oct. 28 that same year in San Francisco. Together they built a log cabin for their first home and raised rabbits to supplement their income. They were married until Bobbie passed 56 years later.

After the ski area was sold, Mr. Sprock took an interest in an innovative and cutting edge pedestrian transport system called the Yantrac People Mover, where he spent much time using his background knowledge in engineering and survey.

Then the couple moved to Montana where they purchased and operated the V & B Ranch located near Wilsall. On their 5,500-acre cattle ranch there were several other businesses operated from this property, such as guided fishing on the property, horseshoeing, and more.

After the loss of Mr. Sprock’s vision due to a stroke, they sold the ranch and moved to Bozeman, Mont. He then took great interest in the activities and accomplishments of his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Mr. Sprock enjoyed skiing, fishing, hunting and family activities. He enjoyed and attended Kirkwood Baptist Church in Bozeman.

Survivors include children, Kathy (Robert) Pavich, and Peter (Juli) Sprock; grandchildren, Christopher Pavich, and Ty Sprock, all of Zephyr Cove, Richard Pettay and three great-grandchildren (Tyler, Jacob, Sara) of Carson City; sister Nadine Tomlinson of Sioux Falls, S.D.

Funeral Services will be at 11am Feb. 20 at Dahl Funeral Chapel, with interment to follow at Sunset Hills Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, the Vernon Sprock Athletic Scholarship Fund has been created for the benefit of alpine skiing athletes through Far West Ski Foundation, a 501(c) 3. Checks may be made payable to Far West Ski Foundation, P.O. Box 861, Fallbrook, CA 92088.