

# WHY IS IT CALLED THAT?

## HILL 70 AT MONT ST. SAUVEUR

CANADIAN SKI YEAR BOOK, 1934

CANADIAN SKI MUSEUM



Overlaid on this 1934 photo is an arrow marking the spot on Hill 70 at Mont St. Sauveur where the plaque honoring Sir Arthur Currie was first placed. At the foot of the hill (lower left) was the new clubhouse of the Red Birds Ski Club, no longer there.

### BY BOB SODEN

In France the 1917 World War I battlefield of Hill 70, long lost in the shadow of nearby and more famous Vimy Ridge, recently claimed its place in Canadian history—after 100 years. On April 8, 2017, the Canadian Minister of National Defense unveiled a monument to memorialize the heroic deeds of the Canadian Corps on the slopes overlooking Lens, a town near the Flemish border.

On March 4, 1934, a similar ceremony was held at Mont St. Sauveur, then known as Sunshine Hill, in Quebec's Laurentian Mountains. Members of the Red Birds Ski Club gathered on the slopes to celebrate the leading role their McGill University principal and co-chancellor, Sir Arthur Currie (who had died the year before), had played in the battle. They unveiled a bronze plaque, affixed to a boulder halfway up the slope, and rechristened the club's "big hill" as Hill 70. Commendatory speeches were delivered by Col. William E. Bovey (Red Bird #4), a member of Currie's military staff during WWI, and Archdeacon John Almond.

In the wee hours of August 15, 1917, Lt.-Gen. Arthur Currie



THE TRAIL BREAKERS / R. STEWART

Sometime after 1972, when the Mont-Saint-Sauveur Group took over the mountain, the plaque was removed from its original site on the slopes (see photo at left) and placed in the Pavilion 70 at the foot of the hill.

Hill 70 near Lens, France, where in 1917 the Canadian Corps captured the strategic high ground under the leadership of Lt.-Gen. Arthur Currie.



WAR MUSEUM OF CANADA

had unleashed his troops and his master plan for the taking of Hill 70—the strategic high ground embracing the vital coal town of Lens (rather than recapturing the town itself, as his British superiors had favored). Currie protected his men with a creeping artillery barrage that fell just a hundred meters or so in front of the advancing divisions, as well as careful planning to minimize casualties, which was not common practice at the time. Though successful, the campaign was still costly: In four days of fighting, Canada lost 9,000 men to Germany's 27,000 wounded, killed or taken prisoner. It was the first time in WWI that Canadian armed forces had been led by a Canadian commander. The Germans considered Currie to be one of the Allies' most capable and fearsome commanders.

On a typical winter evening in 2017, the sparkling night-skiing lights that bracket Hill 70 (now Cote 70) on Mont St. Sauveur evoke the flashing bombardments in the battle for Hill 70 in 1917 France. Fred Pabst, Jr., put in the first rope tow on Hill 70 in late 1934. Today, MSS has 40 trails and eight lifts with a capacity of 15,604 skiers per hour.



WEB SEARCH IMAGE MSS

Sparkling night-skiing lights bracket the slopes of modern-day Mont St. Sauveur in the Laurentian Mountains of Quebec, evoking the flashing bombardments in the battle for Hill 70 during World War I in France.