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ALTA POWDER NEWS

HISTORICAL EDITION

Online edition available at alta.com



1958 National Ski Association "on-snow certification conference" at Alta

Alta's role as a contributor to the formation of professional ski instruction

In April 2011, the Professional Ski Instructors of America-Intermountain Division celebrated 60 years as the regional organization responsible for extensive examination and certification of those desiring authenticated status in the ski teaching profession. Intermountain region, in general, includes Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming.

When skiing was first taking hold as a participation sport around the Intermountain region in the mid to late 1930s, ski instruction was limited to tips provided by anyone who had been on a pair of skis more than one time. Any consistency with regard to techniques employed was purely accidental. However, by the early 1940s, it became evident because of the numbers of individuals interested in taking up the sport that some sort of regulation needed to be applied as to who could provide needed instruction and how proficient the person giving instruction had to be as a ski-slider of the slopes.

The Intermountain Ski Association (ISA), with Forest Service prompting, took the first initiatives to form a certification process during the 1946-47 winter season at Alta, Utah. Headed by Felix Koziol, supervisor of the Wasatch National Forest and Sverre Engen, head of the ski school at Alta, the first steps were undertaken to create the basis for a unified approach to ski teaching in the Intermountain region.

Two years later, on December 5, 1949, the ISA conducted the first Intermountain region instructor examination at Alta. According to Bill Lash, former Alta ski instructor and founder of the Professional Ski Instructors Association, "Alf and Corey Engen ran the program. The test was given in three grades: master instructor, instructor, and apprentice instructor. The cost of the exam was \$10.00 and the renewal fee was \$2.50 per year. In 1950, instructor pins were given out. There were two pins and

ALTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The AHS Mission Statement

The Alta Historical Society is a not-for-profit organization, approved by the IRS under 501 (c) (3) guidelines. It was formally established in 1995, chartered by direction of Alta Mayor, Bill Levitt and initially set up under the umbrella of The Friends of Alta.

The specific mission of the Alta Historical Society is to:

- *Collect and preserve valuable historical photographs, film, documents, artifacts and oral histories that are directly tied to Alta's past.
- *Facilitate ways and means to tell the story of Alta's rich history in ways that will enhance the cultural awareness for visitors and citizens of the Alta community.
- *Work in support of, and collaborate with, other organizations having a focus on Utah history and goals which are compatible with the Alta Historical Society.



classes of certification in 1950, apprentice and instructor. The pin was brass and read "ISA Instructor - 1950" or: "ISA Apprentice Instructor - 1950."

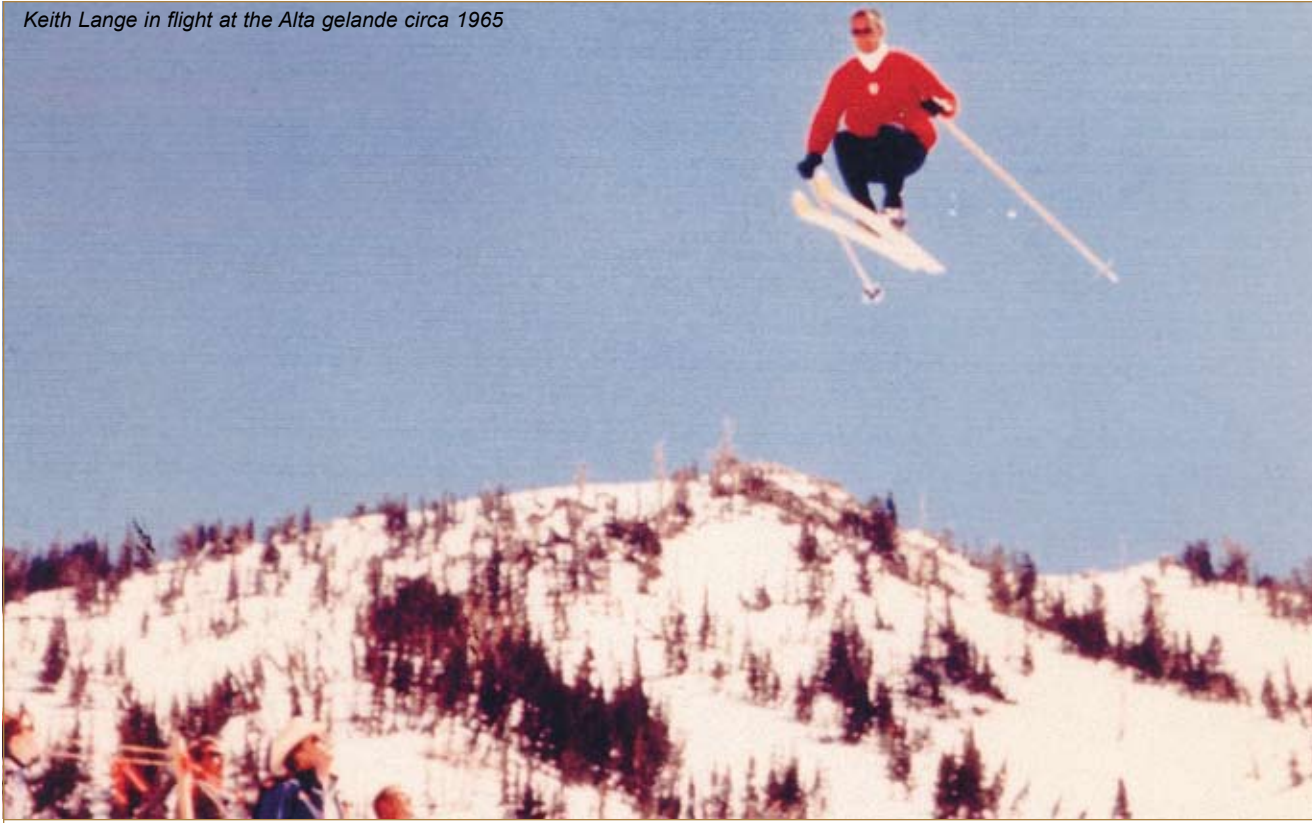
In early December, 1950, another certification examination was conducted, again at Alta, following a session of the Deseret News Ski School. This time, the examination was under the direction of Friedl Lang, a noted ski instructor who had been certified by the U.S. Eastern Ski Instructors Association in 1942. He had taught skiing in North Conway, New Hampshire for Hannes Schneider, considered the father of the Alberg Technique. So, in heading the examination, he brought special insights into the new ski instructor certification process.

Following the December 9, 1950 certification exam, Forest Service Supervisor, Felix Koziol called a special meeting at the Alta Lodge Sitzmark Club room. He told those in attendance that it was his view that the group of instructors assembled needed to take charge of formally setting up and running a new ski instructor organization which would oversee the certification process. All agreed and the name Intermountain Ski Instructors Association (I.S.I.A.) was born at that meeting with the first officers elected. Friedl Lang was elected president, Corey Engen, Vice president, and K. Smith, Secretary/Treasurer.

On November 10, 1951, another Intermountain ski instructor examination was held at Alta. Examiners were K. Smith and brothers, Alf and Sverre Engen. Those who passed the skiing exam were identified as either "Full Certified" instructors or "Apprentice" instructors. At the conclusion of the exam, the instructors gathered again at the Sitzmark Club in the Alta Lodge and conducted new ISIA elections. This time Bill Lash was elected president, Junior Bounous Vice president, and Chuck Rowan, Secretary/Treasurer.

Alta also hosted the ISIA examinations in both January and April 1953, which was significant in the fact that official ISIA Articles of Incorporation were ratified by the instructor group in attendance at those Alta exams and formally

Keith Lange in flight at the Alta gelande circa 1965



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submitted to the state of Utah for official acknowledgement consideration as a legal entity.

The Intermountain Ski Instructors Association remained active with Alta, playing host to several other instructor clinics and examinations throughout the 1950s.

In May, 1958, Alta, under the coordination of the Alf Engen Ski School, hosted the first National Ski Association "on-snow certification conference", which lasted a week for the purpose of establishing national certification standards. The ultimate result of this gathering was Bill Lash writing and publishing a document titled Outline of Ski Teaching, the first complete ski-instructors manual, sent nationwide as a basis of skiing protocols which ultimately became known as the American Skiing Technique.

In May, 1961, a group of seven members representing the seven divisions of the National Ski Association met at Whitefish, Montana for the purpose of reconstituting the Ski Teacher Certification Committee of the National Ski Association into a new organization now known as the Professional Ski Instructors of America. The individuals who voted to make this change included Bill Lash, Paul Valar,



Illustration of Bill Lash, circa mid-1950s

Jimmy Johnston, Doug Pfeiffer, Don Reinhart, Max Dercum, and Curt Chase. In summary, there can be little argument that Alta played a key role in the early development of ski instruction, both locally and nationally. Further, because of the many contributions made by Alta instructor, Bill Lash, he was rewarded by being inducted into the class of 1983 - U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame, located in Ishpeming, Michigan.

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Gelände competitive jumping - an Alta contribution

While gelände jumping has been around since the mid 1800s, the sport of gelände ski flying competition has only been around since the early 1960s and had its roots at Alta.

The term gelände originates from the word gelandesprung, a German word meaning "terrain jump." This type of jumping dates back as far as when modern skiing first started in 1840s by a Norwegian named Sondre Norheim.

Gelände jumping differs from Nordic ski jumping in that alpine equipment with ski poles are used as opposed to the much wider and longer jumping skis. In the early days of alpine skiing, a single long pole was used for balance and speed control. After World War I, an Austrian colonel by the name of Georg Bilgeri invented dual ski poles. From that time on, skiers wishing to perform a gelandesprung could do so with much more control because they could push off with two poles with baskets.

Back in the late 1930s, Utah skiing was experiencing a major transition from a sport in which only a few people participated, with the majority watching on the side-lines, to an activity where hundreds, if not thousands, became active participants. It did not take long for the more adventurous to start flying off bumps found on the mountain hillsides, cliffs, snow cornices, and even freshly run avalanches.

By the late 1940s and early '50s, Utah gelände jumping was gaining in popularity and had as its model of jumping expertise such skiers as Keith Lange, Junior Bounous, Jim McConkey, and of course, brothers, Alf, Sverre, and Corey Engen. Many photos have captured these ski legends and others performing the art of gelände jumping.

In the early 1960s, interest in making gelände jumping into a competitive sport began to surface. Most of the skiers doing gelände jumping at the time credit Alf Engen with being the catalyst for starting the competitive sport. It was he and a handful of others who created the first rules governing gelände competition and held the first tournament in April 1963 on an old unused mine dump at the base of Alta's Rustler hillside. Approximately thirty jumpers, including noted Intermountain ski jumper Dick Simon and alpine racers Jim Gaddis and Alan Engen, were on hand for the competition. At day's end, after two hard landings and breaking two pairs of skis, Alan Engen ended up the winner, with Gaddis and Simon following in second and third place respectively.

While the first gelände tournament was considered very successful, no tournament was held the following year. However, in 1964, a formal proposal was submitted by Jim Gaddis, who was working for the town of Alta at the time as its public relations director. His proposal was to again hold a gelände tournament



Pepi Steigler in flight at Alta's 1966 National Gelände Tournament

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but make it into an annual national event. The proposal was accepted and the Alta Ski Lifts Company agreed to sponsor the competition.

The first recipient of the National Gelande Contest in April 1965 was, appropriately enough, Keith Lange. Jim Gaddis had actually won the event on overall points, but because he was the lead tournament official, declined the first place prize, and it was awarded to Lange. The national event was moved from the Rustler hillside to a different site and on a much larger mine dump, located between Corkscrew and Nina's Curve near the base of the Collins chairlift. This made it possible for longer flights and was ideally suited for spectators wishing to view the competition.

During the years 1965 through 1974, annual national gelande tournaments were held on the same site at Alta as part of the seasons end festivities. In 1969, the event had captured so much attention throughout the country that it was made a feature on ABC's Wide World of Sports. Winners during the Alta gelande sponsoring years included, in addition to Lange, Olympic champion Pepi Steigler, Sam Medford, Bill Latimer, Bob Stingley, Junior Bounous, Marty Loftquist, Don Hinkley, Don Bills, and Ron Baar.

In the years when the gelande championship event was held at Alta, relatively few injuries occurred. But, those few who were injured, plus a few other occurrences involving inappropriate behavior by the jumpers and unruly reactions by some of the spectators, caused Alta Ski Lifts Company to discontinue the annual gelande competition at Alta following the 1974 event.

In 1989, as part of Alta's fiftieth anniversary celebration, the Alta gelande contest was brought back for one last appearance. The contest used the original gelande rules. Sixty-four jumpers participated in the two-day competition on the same mine dump

used for the national gelande tournaments. Park City's Karl Jakobsen took home top honors in the professional class. For the event, a special class was established for "senior" jumpers which was won by Alta's Gene Christiansen, followed by Junior Bounous and Alan Engen respectively.

From a historical perspective, Alta has been in the forefront of the development of gelande competitive jumping and, not so well known, the early development of competitive inverted aerals which has become an international sport. Some of the first inverted aerial events were held on the Alta mine dump as part of the annual gelande competition events. One of the individuals who played a significant role on the sport of aerial freestyle is Bob Theobald. Beginning as a ski shop salesman in the Goldminer's Daughter Lodge at Alta in 1966, he became one of America's first "stars" of inverted maneuvers on skis, or "hot dog-gin," as it was called back then. However, Theobald's contributions to the sport did not end there. Recognized as one of the Legends of Utah in skiing, he is credited for developing and producing the Utah Demonstration Ski Team Tour, sponsored by the Utah Travel Council, Utah Ski Association, and the Salt Lake Convention and Visitors Bureau, to promote tourism. He is also the founding director of the International Freestyle Skiers Association.



Bob Theobald inverted at Alta, circa 1972

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Alta gelande poster featuring Jon Engen, circa 1967



Alan Engen, Alta's first gelande winner in flight, circa 1963



Junior Bounous at the Alta gelande tournament, circa 1966

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The Nichol brothers with their pal Wally Mears in Logan, Utah, circa February 1950

The Nichol brothers

Among Alta's most loyal supporters and ski school craftsmen

From the mid 1940s through the 1960s, one of the most dedicated group of ski enthusiasts at Alta were the late Nichol brothers, Wayne, Vern, Mark, Rulon, and Royce.

In 1948, these five individuals found themselves present at the creation of modern skiing in Utah. As core members of the Deseret News Ski School, the Nichol brothers, along with their pal Wally Mears, assisted Alf Engen teach and inspire beginning skiers from Cedar City, Utah to Pocatello, Idaho.

Mark Nichol remembers the early days. "Alf taught us what to teach just before classes. So we taught what Alf taught us. After the class, he would teach the next step of what to teach others. And that's how we learned to teach." This went on, weekends and holidays, for years. In those days they did it for the love of teaching...and a steak dinner that Alf had to buy after each Deseret News Ski School session.

The Nichols were Intermountain Ski Association (ISA) certified instructors. Rulon went on to be an examiner and they were all among the forerunners who created the Intermountain Ski Instructors Association (ISIA), which is now the Professional Ski Instructors of America – Intermountain (PSIA-I).

Not long after, in the early 1960s, Bill Lash and other aspiring teachers began writing ski teaching manuals based largely on Alf Engen's guidance of the Deseret News Ski School. Those texts marked the way for future PSIA publications. Looking back more than once, Alf said, "By golly, the guy who writes it down is the one who gets the credit. By gosh...you know...I should have written it down."

Besides skiing, the Nichol brothers were accomplished carpenters. All of them had a hand in the building of homes for all the Engen brothers (Alf, Sverre, and Corey), as well as the Rustler Lodge. They built on-and-off ramps for lifts, shacks for the lift operators, and ticket booths for the sellers. They repaired buildings, upgraded interiors, and left a trail of evident good deeds around Alta. They also left a skiing heritage for their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren to follow.

The accompanying photo taken at Beaver Mountain, Utah shows the Nichol brothers and their close friend, Wally Mears. Their armbands designated them as instructors in the Alf Engen Ski School during the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Perhaps no group of Alta instructors enjoyed skiing as a way of life more than the Nichol brothers. This was underscored by frequent singing together on the ski hill of their favorite song which went, in part, "Enjoy yourself, it's later than you think."

A special note of thanks is given to Lynn (Nic) Nichol, son of Mark Nichol, who authored this article. Nic, in his own right, has contributed greatly to Alta over the years and is currently a valued supervisor in the Alf Engen Ski School.

Alta article from the past

The following article was copied from *The Salt Lake Evening Telegram*, February 4, 1915 editorial page:

Star Route Carrier Makes Thrilling Trip Through Snowslides

"Carl Larsen, who has been carrying mail from Sandy to the Alta camp, had an unusual experience yesterday. He started from Sandy with the mail and encountered a terrific snowstorm as soon as he entered the canyon. A companion refused to continue the journey after a few miles had been made in the steep ascent up the mountains. The companion turned back, warning Larsen that he would be killed if he continued to attempt the journey.

Larsen had been over the trail so many times and had weathered all occasions, and he was determined to make the trip. He started with a sleigh and two horses.

He encountered seven snowslides and the last one covered his sleigh and his team. He succeeded in digging out his horses and abandoned the sleigh, finally reaching Alta in the night. He immediately set out with his horses and made the trip back to Sandy without delay, reaching his destination about midnight.

This morning he gathered his mail sacks and set out on snowshoes. He expects to make the daily trip on foot for several days, as the snow is very deep and a number of slides are coming down. It is a hazardous trip during the winter months and more slides have occurred in Alta and along the canyons than any other part of the state. It is estimated that 500 lives have been claimed by snowslides alone since Utah was first settled."



Deseret News instructor Mark Nichol, circa 1949

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