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ALTA POWDER NEWS

HISTORICAL EDITION

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A Brief History of Alta's Chairlifts

During 1938 and very early in 1939, the Alta Ski Lifts Company built its first chair lift—the Collins Lift, the first in the Wasatch Mountains, the fifth in the United States, and probably the fifth in the world. The Collins Lift first carried paying skiers up Collins Gulch on 15 January 1939, missing a hoped-for opening by a month or two.

Sun Valley near Ketchum, Idaho, was the first ski area to design, construct, and operate chair lifts. In 1936-37, Sun Valley installed two chair lifts—one on Proctor Mountain and one on Dollar Mountain. In 1937-38, Sun Valley constructed a third chair lift, this one on Ruud Mountain. Also in 1937-38, Balknap, Laconia, New Hampshire, built its first chair lift—which became America's fourth chair lift. The Collins Lift, constructed in 1938, at Alta, Utah, came next—the first built in Utah and the fifth in the U.S. Alta opened the lift to the public in early 1939 and became the nation's third ski area to have an uphill chairlift conveyance system.

Below we list and date all the chair lifts that have been constructed and/or modified at Alta. Then we present a few key facts about the original Collins Lift, and finally we briefly mention two other scarcely known chair lifts at Alta.

Alta's Chair Lifts

- 1939 – Collins Lift (wooden towers, single chairs)
- 1940 – The Barge Lift
- 1941 – Peruvian Lift (wooden towers, single chairs, no back rests)
- 1942 – Lucky Boy Lift (single chairs)
- 1944 – Rustler Lift (made from some parts of the Lucky Boy Lift)
- 1945 – Peruvian upgrade (backs added to the chair seats)
- 1949 – Collins upgrade (fabricated steel towers replaced wooden towers)
- 1954 – Germania Lift (double chair)
- 1954 – Peruvian Lift (top terminal burns, dismantled, and removed)
- 1959 – Wildcat Lift (fabricated steel towers, double chair)
- 1963 – Albion Lift (double chair)
- 1967 – Sugarloaf Lift (double chair)
- 1970 – Sunnyside Lift (double chair)
- 1973 – Collins Lift (single chair upgrade to double chair)
- 1974 – Germania Lift (alignment changed from Fred's Slot to its present location, which is now the top section of the present Collins Lift)



The original Collins chair in front of the new Collins chair, 2013

The Alta Historical Society A Brief History

The group responsible for the formation of the Alta Historical Society (AHS) included Bob (R.T.) and Karen Travis, Tony Bowman and Dale Gilson. The impetus for the organization came from Bowman, who at that time was an Alta ski patrolman and a student doing his thesis at the University of Utah on Alta's history. It was his intent that the new organization, when formed, would be a chapter under the auspices of the Utah Historical Society, located in Salt Lake City. Bob Travis was elected the first AHS president and served from 1969 through the mid 1980s. Following his and Karen's departure, the AHS group disbanded.

In 1994, AHS was revived with the mission of promoting Alta's rich history. Mayor Bill Levitt played a leading role in putting together a new group headed by Alan Engen. Other members included the late Jody Schrontz, Heidi Mosberg, Barbara Dunlea, Dr. Joe Arave, Connie Marshall and George Ator. Under the umbrella of the Friends of Alta, headed by Mimi Levitt, the new AHS regained status as a Utah historical organization with not-for-profit 501(c)(3) IRS status. Between the latter part of the 20th Century and the early years of the 21st Century, other members were added to this Board of Directors. They included Laura McIndoe, Jim Nichol, Nic Nichol and Brian Jones, who served as president from 2004-2005.

During the early part of 2006, the AHS group went into a semi-functioning status, but regained strength as an active organization during the latter part of 2006 when David Davenport, Sheridan Davis, De Bourdaghs and Dr. Sid Jenson joined the board. Davenport was unanimously elected president of AHS. Also elected were Barbara Dunlea (Vice President); Sheridan Davis (Secretary); and Laura McIndoe (Treasurer). Engen retained his elected position as Chairman.

A program called "Fireside Chats" has recently been re-energized, resulting in favorable skier response. Under this Alta focused program, an impressive slate of recognized ski historians and ski personalities have shared their knowledge and unique perspectives on Alta history.

- 1976 – Albion Lift (major upgrade; motor moved to bottom; new sheave trains)
- 1980 – Wildcat Lift (new lift, single mass towers, on the same alignment)
- 1981 – Cecret Lift (double chair)
- 1981 – Supreme Lift (double chair)
- 1991 – Germania Lift (upgraded to a triple chair)
- 1992 – Sugarloaf Lift (upgraded to fixed-grip triple chair from fixed-grip double chair). Also during this year, the surface rope tow between Wildcat and Albion bases was replaced and



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upgraded with a unique, first of its kind, YAN Company designed Transfer Tow which combined features of a ski lift and rope tow.

- 1999 – Sunnyside Lift (new alignment; upgraded from double to detachable triple)
- 2002 – Sugarloaf Lift (major upgrade; fixed-grip triple to detachable quad)
- 2002 – Supreme Lift (double chair upgraded to triple chair)
- 2004 – Collins Lift (new detachable quad with an angle station; replaced both the Collins and the Germania lifts; runs from the bottom of Collins Gulch to Collins Pass on the top of Germania ridge)

The Original Collins Lift

The Collins Lift was named after Charles H. Collins, who prospected at Alta in the late 1800s. In the 1870s, Alta had a population of about 5,000 people. Collins struck rich ore on the east side of the Peruvian Hill in 1900, near where the Alta Peruvian Lodge now stands. He formed a small mining business called the Collins Group. A few years later he sold his mining interests to investors in Park City, Utah. The mountain area known as Collins Gulch and the ski run called Collins Face obviously carry this man's namesake.

During the Great Depression in the early 1930s, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service began searching for areas that could be developed for recreational skiing. Alf Engen, ski pioneer and legend, was retained by the Forest Service to explore possible locations that could be developed in the Intermountain West. In 1935, he recommended that Alta be a prime candidate. The Forest Service accepted Alf's recommendation. In the spirit of community service, a group of Salt Lake City businessmen formed the Salt Lake Winter Sports Association with the primary goal of developing Alta as a place for local citizens to ski. Those comprising the group included Joe Quinney, W. J. O'Connor, V. R. Parkinson, L. R. Ure, Paul F. Keyser, Bartlett Wicks, Stewart Cosgriff, and P.H. Kittle. In time, the Salt Lake Winter Sports Association became what we know today as the Alta Ski Lifts Company.

One other event happened that made the development of Alta possible. In 1938 George Watson, one of the last remaining active miners at Alta, donated 700 acres of surface rights from about 80 mining claims to the Forest Service. This allowed the Forest Service to issue development permits to the Salt Lake Winter Sports Association.

Some years earlier, Watson had purchased most of these claims from miners when they left Alta because the remaining ore bodies had become unprofitable. As time passed, Watson had Federal delinquent-tax problems. To pay his tax debts, he proposed to convey title of much of his land holdings and surface rights to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, for \$1.00—a very large gift for a very small price—with the stipulation that the land be used for winter-sports recreation. The Forest Service accepted the offer and issued the initial permit to construct the Collins Lift to the Salt Lake Winter Sports Association on 19 October 1938.

To construct the original Collins Chair Lift, the Salt Lake Winter Sports Association made a deal with the Michigan- Utah Mines to purchase the old aerial tram that had carried ore down Little Cottonwood Canyon in the early 1900s. The Salt Lake Winter Sports Association raised \$10,000 for this effort. Marthinus (Mark) Strand, one of Utah's earliest ski promoters, was contracted to build the supports and install the ore tram up the face of the Collins Gulch. The first lift towers were constructed of timbers originally used to brace mine shafts. He was followed by Fred Speyer who supervised the completion of the lift and became Alta's first ski lift manager.

On Sunday, 15 January 1939, the original Collins Lift operated for the first time, carrying 350 people up Collins Gulch. Prices were \$0.25 for a single ride and \$1.50 for a full day. From January 1939 through April 1940, about 86,000 skiers rode the lift. In 1940, the Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce announced that the Denver-Rio Grande Railroad had committed to invest \$25,000 for the further development of Alta as a ski area. Based on the success of the two previous ski seasons (1938-39 and 1939-40) and on this commitment, the Salt Lake Winter Sports Association went on to develop Alta into the special place that it now is.

The Barge Lift

In 1940, the Alta Barge Lift was built as an experiment in an attempt to move skiers up the mountain side after unloading skiers from the top of the original Collins Lift, which stopped

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The Barge Lift, circa 1940



a few yards west of the present Collins Lift Angle Station. The Barge Lift started near where the now-removed second Watson Shelter was located and went up Aggies Alley. The life of the "Barge" was short, only operating for one ski season—1940-41. Because of the many mechanical difficulties, the Barge was dismantled and instead the Peruvian J-Bar Lift was built in the summer of 1941.

Years later, Alan Engen (now Director of Skiing at Alta) asked Chic Morton (then General Manager) if any remnants of the Barge Lift still existed. Chic told him that some of the parts had been used for other lift purposes, but the rest of it had been hauled away to the garbage dump in the late 1940s—and that was the end of the Barge.

The photograph on the left shows the Barge and the top of the first Watson Shelter in the background. D.W. Stickney, Lake Forest, Illinois, took this photograph during the 1940-41 ski season.

The Peruvian Lift

The Peruvian Lift was built in 1941—Alta's second chair lift. It ran from the flat near where the bottom of Aggies Alley intersects with Main Street westward up to the Peruvian Ridge near where the explosive-cache building is now located. The Peruvian Lift provided skiers access to the Wildcat area—from about Tower #17 on the present Wildcat Lift north-by-northwest to Johnson's Warm-Up and onward to Westward Ho, which overlooks the Alta Peruvian Lodge.

The Peruvian Lift had wooden towers and chairs that ran just above the ground. A lift-line trench had to be shoveled out after every major storm. For safety reasons skiers could not ski under the towers because of the trench and the low-hanging chairs. For the first four years of Peruvian lift operation the single chairs had no seat backs. In 1945, the lift was upgraded to include chairs with seat backs, much to the approval of the skiing public.

In 1954 the Peruvian's top terminal burned. Various after-dinner stories relate different causes of the fire—a bolt of lightning, an electrical short, an overheated pot-belly stove—take your pick. Frank "Buck" Sasaki, who worked for many years as Alta's Lift Superintendent, adds to the story: "We closed the lift for lunch. Hans Brogle, who was the top operator, skied down to the bottom of the lift to eat lunch with me.

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While we were eating we saw smoke coming from the top terminal of the lift. Because the motor to run the lift was at the top terminal, there was no way of getting to the top except to hike up in the snow. Because that was not practical and there was no water to put the fire out. From the bottom, we just watched it burn."

After this fire, the Peruvian Lift was dismantled and removed. In 1959 the first Wildcat Lift took its place.

The Lucky Boy Lift

This lift shows prominently on the 1940 Alta Master Plan. You can study its location and the lift line on the 1940 Master Plan, which is hanging on the top floor of the new Watson Shelter near the restrooms. The Lucky Boy Lift was built in 1942 to provide intermediate runs for skiers. Lucky Boy's bottom terminal was near Cottonwood Creek, a little east of the Landes Jump Hill. The top terminal was above and a bit north of the top of Snake Pit.

Unluckily, during the first winter of operation an avalanche swept over the Lucky Boy Lift and virtually wiped it out. For obvious safety reasons, the decision was made to not rebuild another lift in this area. However, in 1944 the usable parts of the Lucky Boy lift were dismantled and rebuilt several hundred yards to the west. It was renamed the Rustler Lift. In the early 1950s, it was deactivated and removed. Some years later, Cal and Dodie McPhie bought this chairlift and installed it at Gorgoza, a small, family-oriented ski area east of Parleys Summit. This ski area no longer exists.



The Lucky Boy Lift being hit by an avalanche in the early 1940's

Sun Valley's and Alta's Enduring Influence

The vision that led to the design, construction, and operation of the first three Sun Valley chair lifts certainly influenced the design and construction of many other chair lifts. The ore hauling tramways that had operated at Alta since the 1860s and Sun Valley's construction of its first chair lifts in 1937 directly influenced the building of the first Collins Lift at Alta.

Sun Valley, backed by Averell Harriman, the Chairman of the Union Pacific Railroad, had millions of dollars to fund the construction of its lifts and the other skier amenities. These amenities made Sun Valley the United State's premier destination ski resort for many years. In the 1930s and 40s, Sun Valley's multi-million dollar financial backing was unlike all other ski resorts in the United States, and especially the ski areas in Utah.

The original Collins Lift cost about \$19,000. This price tag led others to realize that building a chair lift was indeed do-able, even during the Great Depression, and especially do-able after the end of World War II. The original Collins Lift at Alta became an impetus for the construction of later chair lifts in Utah in the 1940s, including Snow Basin, Brighton, Snow Park (now Deer Valley), Beaver Mountain in Logan, Timphaven in Provo, and Jackson Hole, Wyoming, which built a chair lift at Snow King in 1947.

In 1996, the State of Utah Museum officially recognized the Collins Lift's historic importance. As part of Utah's 1996 Statehood Centennial Celebration, the Utah Museum Association named the Collins Lift one of the "100 Treasures of Utah." Primary selection was based on its uniqueness to Utah's culture and heritage, combined with possessing a strong interpretive story.

A special historical display of the Collins Lift can currently be found at the Joe Quinney Winter Sports Center/Alf Engen Ski Museum located at Utah Olympic Park in Snyder Basin, near Park City, Utah. Stop by and see it, then come to Alta and ride the latest Collins Lift that has replaced both the original Collins Lift and the Germania Lift.

The present Collins Lift is a high-speed quad that starts near the Wildcat Ticket Office and ends where the Germania Lift ended—now four skiers at a time ride one lift from the bottom of Collins Gulch to the top of Collins Pass at about 1,000 linear feet per minute, which equates to about 6 minutes 30 seconds or thereabouts—a far cry from the original single-chair Collins Lift.

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Document titled "First Ski Areas to use Chair Lifts in the West" by Alan Engen
Alta history looseleaf binder book: Alta Memories prepared by Alan Engen



The original Peruvian J-Bar lift with no back, circa 1942



Peruvian Lift with backs on the chairs. Alta circa late 1940's

Old Highway 210

Special mule drawn ore cars and aerial tramways in the late 1800's

To get the ore out of the canyon from Alta, a rail bed was constructed along the north side of the canyon where much of the road is presently located. The railway to Alta was completed in 1884 by the Wasatch and Jordan Valley Railroad.

In addition to the rail tracks, snowsheds built by Chinese labor, had to be constructed to protect the railway from avalanches which continued to run on a frequent basis during winter months. When the railway was first completed to Alta, the rail cars were pulled by steam engine to a railway station located at Wasatch, near the base of Little Cottonwood Canyon.

From there, mules hitched to the rail cars in tandem pulled the cars the rest of the way up the canyon on a single track tramway to the terminus located at the Emma Mine at Alta. The mules were then unhitched and turned loose to find their way back down the canyon to the Wasatch railway station location. The ore cars were filled and allowed to coast down the canyon with a brakeman to control the speed.

The method of ore transport was later expanded to allow sightseers to come to Alta as a day excursion. In addition to the narrow-gage single track mule tramway, there was an aerial tramway which was also used to haul ore from Alta. The aerial tramway crossed over land where the current By-Pass Road exists and continued down to Tanners Flat.



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Principal contributors to Alta's development as a ski area

Few people know more than a sentence or two about those people who were the principal developers of Alta as a ski mecca. As part of the 70th Year Anniversary of Alta, we have prepared five short biographical sketches of people whom we consider principal contributors to Alta's conception, gestation, birth, and to some meaningful degree, Alta's longevity.



Seymore Joseph Quinney
A Visionary, A Compass, and a Legal Linchpin

S. Joe Quinney was a key player in the development of Alta as a ski area. He was born in Logan, Utah, in 1892 to English-Swiss parents, Joseph and Ida Theuer Quinney. Following graduation from Utah State Agricultural College in Logan, he served in the Army during World War I. Following discharge from the service, he enrolled at Harvard University, graduating with a law degree in 1919.

In 1921, Quinney was elected to the Utah House of Representatives. Here he gained a full understanding of the laws applicable to land under control of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service.

While still attending Harvard Law School, he met his wife to be, Jessie Eccles, and they were married in 1917. Two children followed—a son, David Quinney Sr., and a daughter, Janet. Both became active competitors in ski events and it was because of their involvement in the sport that Joe Quinney found it better to participate than stand around as a spectator.

By the late 1920s and into the early 1930s, the local Utah citizens were becoming more aware of the sport of skiing because of the local press highlighting accounts of daring ski jumping activities centered at a place called Ecker Hill, near Park City. Because of his son's interest in ski jumping, Quinney soon met and became closely associated with the large Norwegian contingent of ski jumping enthusiasts. Among them were Marthinus "Mark" Strand, Axel Andreson, and Pete Ecker for whom Ecker Hill was named. This particular group were the primary forces behind the organization of the Utah Ski Club.

Joe Quinney soon became active in the club as a director and within a few years became president. He served from 1935 to 1938. Alf Engen once said, "There were more accomplishments during Joe Quinney's period as president than at any other time. The U.S. National Ski Jumping Championship held at Ecker Hill in 1937, under Joe Quinney's direction, was the biggest and best sporting event ever held in Utah up to that time."

From active participation in the Utah Ski Club and promotion of some of the world's largest Nordic ski jumping events of the 1930s, he turned his attention to another phase of the development of skisport in the Intermountain region—alpine skiing.

Public interest in skiing during the latter part of the 1930s was turning from being a "spectator" to "active participation" in the sport. The Forest Service, in an effort to create places for local people to enjoy skiing in a controlled environment, searched for suitable areas along the Wasatch mountains near Salt Lake City. One of those was Alta, well known as a former mining center but also holding promise as a possible site for ski development. The basic limitation was insufficient land under Forest Service control. Most of the land at Alta was owned through individual mining claims.

Joe Quinney's law firm, Ray, Quinney and Nebeker, in Salt Lake City represented the American Smelting and Refining Company which held mortgages on the Alta United Mines Company, owned by a gentleman named George H. Watson. Because of tax delinquency problems concerning the Alta claims he owned, Watson was looking for a way out of his predicament. After much discussion, a plan was set in motion where-by Alta United Mines Company would arrange the conveyance of the surface rights to its claims to the U.S. Forest Service. For that, Watson would be relieved of his delinquent tax obligations and the Forest Service would make the Alta area available to the skiing public.

Salt Lake promoters, under the leadership of S. Joe Quinney, agreed to organize a corporation which, under Forest Service permit, would "construct a ski lift and related facilities at Alta and would have the first rights for further and additional construction of such facilities in the Alta area." To that end, a corporation was set up called the Salt Lake City Winter Sports Association. \$10,000 was raised through the organization to construct a chair lift in Collins Gulch at Alta. A subsequent contract was awarded to Marthinus (M.A.) Strand to build the lift. Joe Quinney did all the legal work associated with this effort and served as secretary-treasurer of the organization from 1939 to 1958, at which time he became its president, a position he held for the next 25 years.

Original incorporators of the Salt Lake City Winter Sports Association included, in addition to Quinney, E.D. Nordquist, Paul Keyser, Stewart Cosgriff, Bartlett Wicks, W.J.

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O'Connor, Lincoln Ure, Percy Kittle and R.B. Parkinson. O'Connor served as the organization's first president from 1939 to 1958.

The Forest Service, played an important role in Alta ski area development by arranging to keep Little Cottonwood Canyon open during winter months. They began using new avalanche control methods and granting permits, as needs came up, to further develop new lifts and related facilities in the Alta basin.

While Joe Quinney remained head of the Salt Lake Winter Sports Association, many advances were made at Alta. It was his personal conviction that skiing should not be a "rich person's sport." As a result, he made it a prime objective to maintain reasonable costs at Alta and only raise rates if it became absolutely necessary to adequately operate the lifts. He further felt Alta should remain a "low key" place where skiers could enjoy the beauty of the surrounding mountain peaks and the wonderful snow conditions it possessed.

For Joe Quinney's many contributions and accomplishments, he was the recipient of the Winter Sports Award by the Salt Lake Area Chamber of Commerce in 1967 and was inducted into the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1975. In 2002, he became one of the first recipients to be inducted, posthumously, into the Intermountain Ski Hall of Fame.

S. Joe Quinney remained a guiding force at Alta until he passed away on November 22, 1983 at age 91. He leaves a lasting legacy as a true "skisport builder." His memory remains alive at the Joe Quinney Winter Sports Center/Alf Engen Ski Museum located at Utah Olympic Park near Park City.



James Laughlin IV
Promoter of Conservative Development

James Laughlin played a significant role in skiing development, nationally as well as in the

Intermountain region during the late 1930s through the 1950s. He preferred to be known as simply "J" with his last name pronounced lock-in.

Laughlin began skiing in 1935, at age 21, when he spent a year in Europe following a temporary leave from his intellectual pursuits at Harvard University. He spent the winter in St. Anton, Austria and took ski lessons. According to

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Laughlin, "I took lessons with the Hannes Schneider Ski School for about six weeks. I learned to turn and had some fun. As a result I graduated two years late, with the class of '39 . . . after two leaves of absence to study skiing."

During his time in the Alps, Laughlin fell in love with the European ski-hut program—people hiking for part of a day and then staying overnight in a ski hut, repeated each day for about 1 week. He felt the system was so useful and enjoyable that he introduced it to the United States upon his return with a series of writings, several of which ended up in the Ski Bulletin, currently a prime source for ski historical research.

On returning to the U.S., he finished his schooling at Harvard and started a publishing business under the name New Directions, which published many new authors, such as Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Dorothy Parker, and others.

During the early 1940s, he met the highest ranking ski star in the United States—Dick Durrance. They quickly developed a lasting friendship, primarily due to their common interest in skisport.

During the winter of 1940-41, Durrance was retained by the Salt Lake Winter Sports Association to head up the ski school at Alta, and do some finishing work on the Alta Lodge, which was under construction. Durrance and his new wife, Miggs, invited Laughlin to come out from his New England location and have a look at this place called Alta, high in the Wasatch Mountains of Utah. Laughlin accepted Durrance's invitation and fell in love with the place.

According to Laughlin, Alta ". . . reminded me of Zurs, Austria, before it was developed." The following year, he returned to Alta and took over the lease on the Alta Lodge. One of the first things he did to stimulate interest in the new Alta ski area was to underwrite the cost of an annual springtime ski race which was called the Alta Cup. Local as well as nationally recognized ski racers participated during the years 1942 through 1946.

In 1952, Laughlin and Fred Speyer bought out the Rio Grande Railroad's interest in the Alta Lodge. Chic Morton, in turn, purchased Speyer's interest in the Lodge in 1958. Laughlin sold his lodge interest to Bill Levitt in 1959 and began devoting more of his energy in support of the Alta ski lift operations in which he had a vested interest.

From his early investment in Alta to his passing, in late fall 1997, he played a significant role in Alta's conservative approach to development. He was a strong advocate for keeping the area as pristine as possible to avoid running the risk of spoiling Alta's beautiful surroundings in favor of growth and expansion. This philosophy has been shared by many of the Alta pioneers and visionaries and continues as a cornerstone of current local town direction.

Over J Laughlin's lifetime, he received a number of prestigious awards. Among those were "Distinguished Contribution to American Letters" by the National Book Foundation and "Lifetime Achievement Award" in Journalism by the International Skiing History Association in 1994.



Charles "Chic" Morton

Alta's Long-time Low Key, Low Price, High Enjoyment GM

When we reflect on Alta's rich history and spin a yarn or two, one of the key names that inevitably comes to the fore is that of the late Charles "Chic" Morton.

Morton's beginnings at Alta in 1946 were a result of encouragement by then Alta Ski School Director, Sverre Engen. Sverre and Chic had developed a friendship several years earlier when an opening for a bartender came up at the Alta Lodge. Sverre insisted that Chic apply for the job so they could frequently ski together.

Morton landed that first bartender job. With it came the beginning of a career at Alta which lasted over 50 years. Other positions followed in short order which included managing the Alta Lodge from the early 1950s through the 1957 ski season, followed by taking the helm as General Manager of the Alta Ski Lifts Company in 1958. In 1976 Morton was named President and General Manager of Alta Ski Lifts Company, a position he retained until he relinquished his duties to Onno Wieringa in 1988. He remained active as President of Alta Ski Lifts until his death on July 14, 1997.

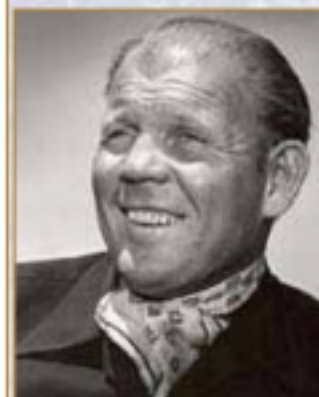
During the years that Chic Morton played a primary role in operations at Alta, he maintained a core philosophy of keeping skiing at Alta low key, at the lowest possible cost, with a special emphasis on customer enjoyment. That philosophy continues under the leadership of Alta's current president and general manager, Onno Wieringa.

During Morton's lifetime, he received many accolades. Perhaps the most significant testimonial for his years of outstanding accomplishments was highlighted by being named a recipient of the S. J. and J. E. Quinney Award for lifetime achievement to the Sport of Skiing by the University of Utah Marriott Library's Ski Archives in 1995.

Although Charles Morton is no longer among the living at Alta, his memory remains with us who do live and work here. A special photograph of him graces the wall of the Albion Grill

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along with several others—S. Joe Quinney, J Laughlin, and Alf Engen—all of whom played a role in the development of Alta as a world recognized destination ski area.



Alf M. Engen
Skiing's Greatest Ambassador

Alf Engen often said of his beloved Alta, "I have the most beautiful office in the world, here is where I want to be."

Alf was born in Mjondallen, Norway, in 1909 and first came to Alta in 1935 at the request of the Forest Service. At that time he was internationally recognized as a world champion ski jumper. Because of his ski prowess, he was retained by the Forest Service to look over Alta's terrain and make a recommendation as to whether the old mining town would make a reasonable site for a ski area. After a couple of visits, Alf made a strong favorable recommendation regarding Alta's potential as a winter sports facility, and the rest is history.

Alf's record of achievements in American competitive skiing is perhaps without parallel. He was a sixteenth time winner of the U.S. National Championships in amateur and professional competitions, and is the only skier on record to have won the national title in all skiing disciplines (downhill, slalom, jumping, and crosscountry), not just once, but twice. He was also the Canadian and North American ski jumping champion in 1937 and set several world ski jumping records, once breaking the world record twice in one day. Alf was coach of the United States Winter Olympic Ski Team in 1948, and he appeared in eight full-length motion pictures. As a ski developer, Alf laid out 31 ski areas including Alta and Snowbasin in Utah and Bogus Basin in Idaho.

Following Alf's coaching of the U.S. Winter Olympic Ski Team in 1948, he moved his family from Sun Valley, Idaho, to Utah and took over the ski school at Alta from his brother, Sverre. The ski school quickly gained a strong reputation, known as the Alf Engen Ski School, which he directed until 1989 when he was given the honored title of Alta's Director of Skiing.

For Alf's many lifetime accomplishments, he was inducted into the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1959. He passed away in July 1997 at the age of 88. In late 1999, the Salt Lake Tribune named Alf "Utah's Athlete of the 20th Century," an honor which considered outstanding representatives from all summer and winter sports.

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Following the 2002 Winter Olympic Games held in Salt Lake City, a new "world class" ski museum carrying his namesake was opened to the public at Utah *Olympic Park near Park City, Utah.*



Bill Levitt

Alta's Second "Appointed" Mayor and Alta's First "Elected" Mayor

In the Who's Who of Alta over the past half century, the name William "Bill" Levitt stands among the first rank. Although not a native to Utah, as he puts it, he is "one of Utah's most loyal patriots."

Levitt, born February 18, 1917, started his skiing interest in the early 1930s. At age 14 while at scout winter camp in New York State, he strapped on a friend's pair of old wooden skis, without metal edges, and proceeded to slide down a sloped roadway leading to a lake covered with ice. Says Levitt, "I must have gone

a quarter of a mile across the lake before I came to a stop. I thought this was the greatest thing that had ever happened to me. I went back up the hill and tried it again, but this time something went wrong and I fell head first into a snow bank. That was my introduction to the sport of skiing."

Many years went by before Levitt tried skiing again. His second experience was with a business associate at a small area called Big Bromley in the mid 1950s. After getting outfitted, he took his first ski lessons and became hooked. Shortly after, he and his wife decided to go west and try skiing over the Thanksgiving holiday. Their plans were to go to Aspen, which had marginal snow conditions that year. Friedl Pfeifer, who was at that time the ski school director at Aspen recommended that they go to Alta instead. The Levitt's followed Pfeifer's suggestion in 1954 and so began a long-lasting love affair with that location high in the towering Wasatch Mountains of Utah. As Levitt tells the story, "I had to make a choice, buy United Airlines so I could afford to continue coming to Alta on a frequent basis or purchase the Alta Lodge. I decided to do the latter and bought the lodge in 1959 from J Laughlin."

Alta incorporated as a township in 1970, largely due to a growing need to gain United States Federal funding to construct a sewer line linking the town to the Salt Lake Valley's sewer system. Levitt was elected the town's president in 1971 until 1975 when the Utah Legislature changed the designation from President to Mayor—at which time he was re-elected, becoming Alta's first elected Mayor. The only other person who carried that title was George Watson who self-appointed himself as Mayor in the late 1930s.

Also, during his tenure as mayor of Alta, he was involved in overseeing the planting of over 2,500 trees; and was a member of the Tourism Planning Commission. When reflecting on his many contributions, perhaps his greatest legacy has been in his firm resolve to keep Alta protected from never ending demands for commercial development.

Bill Levitt was Alta's Mayor from 1972 through 2005. His contributions have and continue to have a lasting impact on the Town of Alta. Under his guidance, the town of Alta gained a fire department, a small police force, a community center, a modern communications center that handles emergencies on a 24-hour 7-day-a-week basis.

Levitt, in addition to his mayoral duties, was a founding member of the Utah Ski Association and served as President for 2 years. He served on the organization's Board of Directors Executive Committee during the mid- to late-1970s. He was also appointed to the Board and served as President of the Utah League of Cities and Towns, and received the prestigious title of "Utah's Outstanding Mayor" by the Utah League of Cities and Towns. For his outstanding contributions to the promotion of winter sports, he was inducted into the Utah Tourism Hall of Fame in 1988.

In addition to running day-to-day operations of the Alta Lodge with his wife, Mimi, he was an active member of the Professional Ski Instructors Association—Intermountain Division, and participated as a certified ski instructor in the Alf Engen Ski School. For his years of continuing significant support to the ski school, Alf Engen awarded him ski school "honorary status" in the mid-1970s.

Levitt's reign as Alta's Mayor lasted 34 years and is the longest span of time of any Mayor in Utah's history. Throughout his years of dedicated service, Levitt chose to limit his annual mayoral salary to \$1.00. Tom Pollard, Alta's recently elected mayor and Bill's replacement gave this comment: "Bill Levitt's passion for the job and his dedication to the community is something I hope to match—but it will be a daunting task to adequately fill his shoes."

The "Wild Old Bunch" Alta's Senior Ski Ambassadors

Over the years, Alta has been the ski home to many enthusiastic outdoor supporters of Utah's scenic Wasatch Mountains. Perhaps no group has provided a more exuberant, happy, and fun-loving presence to the Alta environment than a gathering of skiers who range in age from the 50s to the mid 90s and who go by the name The Wild Old Bunch.

Rush Speddon, a retired business executive and a western historian of merit, deserves the primary credit for getting the group started in the late 1960s and early 70s and for coming

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up with the now-well-known name via a home movie he filmed and produced titled "The Wild Old Bunch."

The Wild Old Bunch began when Rush Speddon and a good friend, the late Annie Noy, took a powder lesson at Alta in the mid 1960s and immediately fell in love with skiing the "Greatest Snow on Earth." Wanting to share this pleasure with others, they began gathering others who shared a similar interest in powder skiing. In 1971, Annie Noy, at age 64, lost her life in a tragic ski accident; however, the group stayed together, with the core members being, in addition to Speddon, Johnny Bell, Art Wilder, Ray Hinkle, Foley Richards, and Walt Katzenberger. This group became the unofficial hospitality greeters at Alta.

Over the span of almost a half-century, the Wild Old Bunch has grown from just a handful of dedicated powder skiers to over 200 members. They can be recognized on the Alta hillsides by a distinctive round patch on their ski wear, featuring a smiling face. When not skiing, they can usually be found inside Alta's Alf's Restaurant, enjoying lunch and "holding court" with other interested skiers. Some well-known Alta skiers have been or are current members, include the late Alf Engen, the late Lowell Thomas, Suzy Harris Rytting, Nic Nichol, Alan Engen, Keith Lange, and Ruth Rogers Altmann.

According to Speddon, there are no rules to join this group and there are no dues. The only requirement is that you enjoy skiing and the companionship of others who have like interests. The group has been interviewed and written about by such legendary ski personalities as the late film producer, John Jay, and by the Associated Press. In 2006, a local TV station made a short special that featured the group and extolled the special contribution they make to Alta.



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As a tribute, skier Bruce Sherman wrote a reflective poem titled *The Wild Old Bunch*. A few selected stanzas follow:

There's a group that skis at Alta
That stops at Alf's for lunch.
A gang of grizzled veterans...
They're called "The Wild Old Bunch!"
Each one has skied for many years,
Their first lift a rope tow...
But now that they're "in the bucks,"
Heli-skiing's where some go.

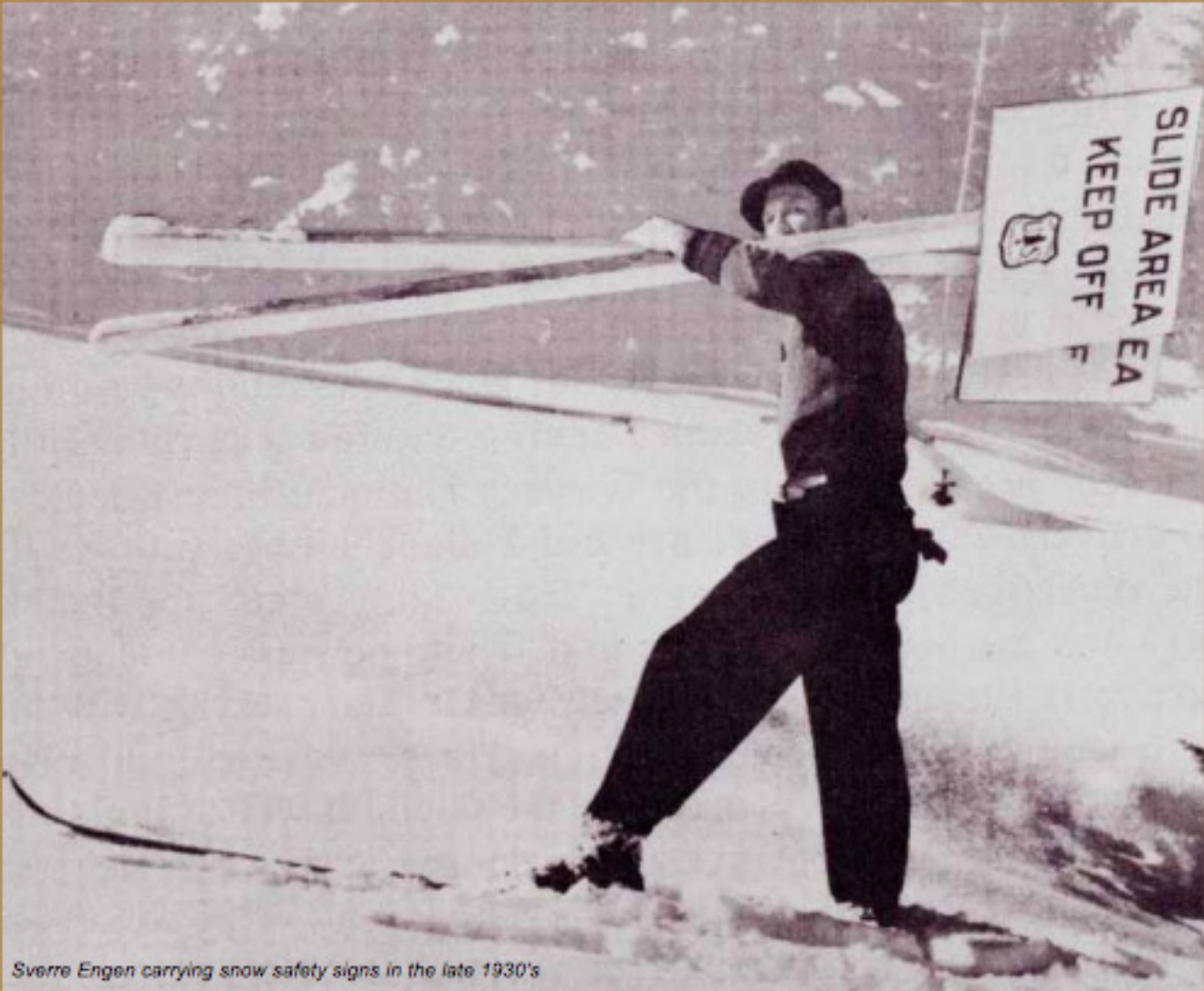
You'll find them on the mountain
From the first day to the last...
And it will just amaze you
That they can ski so fast.

Their style and form are varied,
Stein Erikson they're not,
But regardless of conditions,
They don't really fall a lot. . . .

Their clothing runs the gamut,
Obermeyer and Bogner, too.
All of them wear helmets...
Concussions? There have been a few.

They show up when it's snowing...
They love it when there's sun,
Regardless of the weather,
You'll spot them on every run.

They come from many places,
From the plains to the shining sea.
When the snow begins to fall,
Alta's where they want to be.



Sverre Engen carrying snow safety signs in the late 1930's

Snapshot of Alta's Snow Safety History

"Avalanche"—The word sends chills down the spine of any experienced skier in the high country! Every ski season, conditions along the Wasatch Mountains, with its abundance of snow pack, presents conditions that often can, and do, unleash avalanches, resulting in injury and (or) loss of life. This article focuses on a number of individuals who have made significant contributions to snow safety procedures, and the role Alta has made over the years as a leader in the development of avalanche-control technology.

Alta lies in a powder skier's paradise, receiving on average over 500 inches of snow annually. Last year Alta received slightly more than 700 inches. When snow falls on the rugged, towering peaks of upper Little Cottonwood Canyon, avalanches become an ever-present concern. In the mid-1800s when Alta was a mining center, it was nearly destroyed by avalanches on a couple of occasions. Noted artist, Thomas Moran (1837-1926), created a painting that depicts an Alta avalanche that caused severe damage to the mining center in February 1875. The Salt Lake Daily Tribune reported that this avalanche nearly wiped out the Alta mining camp and claimed 16 lives. The survivors took shelter in mine shafts located nearby.

The inhabitants of Alta cut down the trees on the slopes to shore up the mine tunnels and to build cabins, stores, hotels, and bars. By the mid-1880s, most of the trees had been removed on the north and south-facing slopes, causing avalanches to come down from virtually all directions. A now famous 1885 photo taken by Charles R. Savage shows the old Alta town with the north-facing Rustler hillside void of any timber. The ensuing avalanches that came were indeed caused, in part, by human error.

The Utah Mining Gazette wrote an article on August 30, 1873 stating: "In the year 1871, the first snow storms appeared on the 28th day of September and increased until from 12 to 15 feet on the level covered the whole district [of Alta], and in some places as deep as 40 feet. The last major storm for that winter was the 30th day of June, with a fall of upwards of two feet of snow. In the following year, the storms commenced on the 24th of October and the last snowstorm, of a very few inches, on the 30th of June.

Snow slides are very frequent during the winter and they have been disastrous every season; several teamsters and miners have been killed thereby." Documented fatalities during the early mining days (1872 to 1911) at Alta total 74.

When Alta began as a ski area in the mid- to late-1930s, alpine skiing was also growing as a winter pastime along the Wasatch Front, including Park City and Brighton. To provide a level of safety for the skiers, the Forest Service, whose mission policy at that time was to "fully administer public land use," took it as a principal responsibility to protect life and property from avalanches. The historical significance of this is that the Forest Service played a key role in establishing the first snow safety measures taken in the infancy of American skiing. Much credit goes to the Forest Service because of

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The original four members of the Wild Old Bunch. Left to Right: Art Wilder, Foley Richards, Johnny Bell, Rush Spedden. Photo circa 1973



Rush Spedden and Alan Engen at Alf's Restaurant.

Long live The Wild Old Bunch!

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the measures it took in the Intermountain area during the early skiing years at Alta.

Alta was of particular concern to the Forest Service because of its steep, towering peaks and abundance of snow during the winter. Wasatch Forest Supervisor James E. Gurr and District Ranger W.E. Tangren are responsible for preparing the initial snow safety plan to be followed at Alta. Tangren is credited with becoming the first snow and avalanche observer for the Forest Service. He was stationed at Alta during the 1938-39 winter season and maintained a log of all avalanches that he observed.



In late 1939, Supervisor Gurr retained the services of then well-known ski jumper, Sverre Engen, to work with Mr. Tangren and perform various measurements and snow studies. The following winter, 1940-41, Sverre assumed full responsibility for snow research at Alta. He maintained a weather station and other equipment donated by the U.S. Weather Bureau. The title given to Sverre was that of "Snow Ranger," the first person given that title in the U.S.. Sverre's responsibilities were to monitor snow conditions at Alta and to close the area and road if necessary when avalanche hazards were at a high level. In addition, Sverre was given the task of further refining the Alta Snow Safety Plan, supervising ski-related safety measures, performing various snow measurements, and recording the data.

In 1942 Felix C. Koziol, nicknamed Kozy, replaced James Gurr as Forest Supervisor of the Wasatch National Forest (now named the Uinta, Wasatch, Cache National Forest). Koziol concentrated on becoming fully versed on all operational aspects involved with winter activities at Alta up to the end of World War II. He became convinced that with the additional number of skiers coming up Little Cottonwood Canyon, the Forest Service needed to find a better way to control avalanches.



Felix Koziol, circa early 1960's

In an article by Koziol himself, titled "In the "Wake of a Snow Flake—A New Industry Comes to Utah," December 1946 edition of The Utah Magazine, he wrote: "During the first postwar year of 1945-1946, when things were again getting a bit under way, Alta had 80,000 visitors. . . . In this figure lie problems ahead for the Forest Service and other agencies within whose jurisdiction come matters pertaining to public service, sanitation, and safety. When skiers by the scores of thousands begin to use the mountain regions that are so vast and expansive as those of Utah, there is no easy way of conversion to provide the necessities and facilities that one reads about in Switzerland or Bavaria [Austria] where the first ski resorts of the world were developed. . . . Winter skiers wander all over the landscape. Many are not content to stay on the practice slopes and on the ski runs close to the lifts. An increasing number are seeking ways of getting far out into the alpine hinterlands, far away from the snow bunny crowd. These enthusiasts want marked ski trails, ski huts and shelters, first aid caches and similar guarantees of safety. The wandering public that seeks to use the national forests for winter recreation is making new and growing demands upon the Forest Service."

Kozy commissioned the Forest Service engineering section to do a detailed historical study on the history of avalanches and to define "essential factors" that would determine the necessity of closing the ski area, and to determine under what conditions the area would be allowed to reopen following a snow storm.

In 1945, Montgomery M. Atwater, nicknamed Monty, replaced Sverre Engen as Snow Ranger when Sverre accepted the position of Alta's ski school director. Monty brought significant knowledge of explosives to the position because of his military experience during World War II as a member of the legendary 10th Mountain Division. Sverre Engen had developed a close friendship with Atwater during winter warfare training with the 10th Mountain Division in Colorado Springs. Immediately following the war, Sverre resumed his duties as Alta's Snow Ranger, but shortly after, he recommended to the Forest Service that Atwater be hired as his replacement. Atwater was a multi-talented individual who graduated from MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) with a degree in English. In addition to his accumulated knowledge of explosives, he was a very gifted writer and put those skills to good use by authoring several of the first books on avalanche control and a number of high-adventure books for children.

In 1948, Monty wrote an article for Ski Illustrated magazine, titled Cerberus of the Snows. In it he touched upon his early days as a snow ranger. He wrote:

"I often wonder what made me think becoming a snow ranger would be a good cure for the frayed nerves and demo[lition] phobia of war. . . . What an existence: his own house at Alta, passes on every lift, nothing to do all winter but ski, and paid for it besides! When I received my appointment as Forest Service Administrator at Alta, I had cherished illusions. Snow and only snow would be my concern. Equipped with every scientific device, backed by the records and experience of years, I would study the Eldritch stuff. It would yield to me the secrets of why it [snow] stays put one day and comes tumbling down another. The skiers would gambol under my watchful eye and look on me as a helpful father. However, the first thing I did when I got to Alta was fill the thousand-gallon tank of a chemical toilet,

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on foot, with buckets. I practiced the arts of mason, carpenter, electrician, plumber, house painter and garbage collector. I got involved in a forest fire. By the time the mountains put away their gorgeous autumn trappings and donned the bridal robes of winter, I had been deflated to normal size."

Although Atwater was not the first to use explosives for avalanche control at Alta, he was the first to employ the use of snow sampling tubes containing dynamite inserted into holes drilled into cornice buildup and subsequently detonated electronically from a safe distance.

The combination of Atwater and Koziol resulted in significant advances made in the early development of winter sports on National Forest land during the late 1940s and early '50s. One of their contributions included producing a manual, published by the Forest Service, for winter-recreation-area administrators titled, "Alta Avalanche Studies."

With increasing interest in skiing along the Wasatch front, Koziol and Atwater took another step forward by introducing the use of a military howitzer to dislodge potential avalanches. Koziol negotiated for an old 75mm French artillery howitzer from the Utah National Guard. The old artillery cannon was being used only for ceremonial purposes by the military at that time. Agreement was reached to put it to use at Alta for snow safety purposes, conditional on its being used only by trained military personnel. Its first firing was performed by Captain Elkins of the Utah National Guard on March 30, 1949, and proved successful in bringing down the snow as planned.



Monty Atwater firing a 75-mm French howitzer, early 1950's

Continued use of artillery was not easy because the military took a dim view of using weapons of this type for non-military use. It took considerable effort by Koziol and another prominent Federal Government person, John Herbert, to convince those in charge in Washington D.C. that continuation of the avalanche work being done at Alta was crucial for public safety. At that time, John's son, Jack, was a member of Alta's ski patrol. This probably helped shape the elder Herbert's personal interest in promoting avalanche studies at Alta.

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By the early 1950s, Atwater had gained a strong national reputation for his knowledge of avalanche control resulting in strong demands for his time as a teacher/consultant for new avalanche schools being conducted at Alta and other locations in the Western United States. As a result of demands on his time, which took him away from Alta, Atwater brought in Ed LaChapelle to assist with his Snow Ranger duties in 1952. In contrast to Atwater, LaChapelle was a trained scientist. His skills included being a graduate physicist, glaciologist with a year's study at the Avalanche Institute in Switzerland, and he was also an expert ski mountaineer.



Ed LaChapelle at Alta, circa mid 1950's

In early 1953, LaChapelle gained a full appreciation of the power of avalanches at Alta. In the early morning hours following a heavy snow storm, a large avalanche ran, involving both Cardiff and Flagstaff on the south facing slopes above the ranger station cabin. Luckily, there existed a natural hillside barrier above the cabin which caused the avalanche to split, half running down a draw and ending close to the Peruvian Lodge and the other half destroying the instruments in the weather-observation tower set up near the guard station. The avalanche barely missed the old Alta bunkhouse. It continued at full strength over the road, hitting the west side of the Alta Lodge. The avalanche went through the Alta Lodge dining area on the main floor and hit a

room on the lodge's west side, which was occupied by the Alf Engen family, completely covering 12-year-old Alan Engen, who was sleeping in the room at the time. Fortunately, Alan was dug out quickly by his father and no one else was buried. However, damage to the Alta Lodge, other structures, and large pine trees, was extensive. In a film clip of Ed LaChapelle recounting this event, he said, "That encounter certainly remains vivid in my mind. It was pretty impressive and my first experience with large avalanches like that one. My learning curve went up quickly at that point."

LaChapelle, because of his prior training with the Avalanche Institute in Switzerland, began setting up a European-style snow-study program at Alta using skills he acquired from leading winter experts in snow safety. This program, called the Alta Avalanche Study Center (AASC), gained international recognition by avalanche experts and resulted in a number of scientific publications being produced and distributed world wide.

In the late 1950s, Atwater left Alta to take on a special consultant position in evaluating avalanche hazards at Squaw Valley, California, which was preparing for the 1960 Winter Olympics. LaChapelle took over Atwater's duties, along with continuing his scientific research efforts.

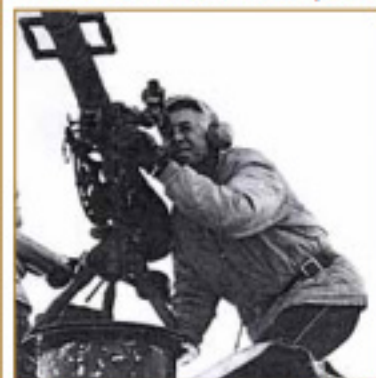
By the mid 1960s, the winter snow safety activities at Alta had expanded. Ron Perla was hired to join the AASC staff. During his tenure at Alta, he completed his Ph.D. at the University of Utah. In the early 1970s, Perla joined the Forest Service research group in Fort Collins, Colorado.



Ron Perla at Alta, circa mid 1960's

During the 1970s, because of funding limitations by the Federal Government, the avalanche study facilities at Alta were greatly diminished, with most of the research programs transferred to a similar facility, called the Alpine Snow and Avalanche Project, located in Colorado.

LaChapelle left Alta in the early 1970s and began an academic career at the University of Washington. LaChapelle, in leaving Alta, summarized his feelings on the demise of the AASC program by saying, "Perhaps some day the AASC, like the fabled phoenix, will rise from the ashes of neglect under a new banner and resume work in the Wasatch Mountains of Utah, surely one of the finest places in the world for avalanche research." LaChapelle passed away at the age of 80 on February 1, 2007, following a ski outing at Monarch Mountain in Silverton, Colorado.



Binx Sandahl, circa mid 1970's

Another Alta snow safety expert who provided contributions during the 1960s through late 1980s was Bengt "Binx" Sandahl. Binx first came to Alta in 1953 and worked as a bar tender in the Alta Lodge. The following year, he left Alta and moved to Alaska where he worked for the Alaska Highway Department and also worked as the snow safety director at the Alyeska ski area. In 1964, he moved back to Utah and following a brief stint as a ski instructor in the Alf Engen Ski School, began work full time with the Wasatch National Forest as a Snow Ranger at Alta.

One of Sandahl's primary early beliefs in the 1960s was that the ski patrol at Alta could, and should, also play a primary role in snow safety activities. He was able to persuade then Alta Ski Lifts General Manager, Chic Morton, to provide a team of ski patrolmen to work with the Alta Snow Rangers on avalanche control work. By working as a collective team, they were able to perform avalanche control efforts during storms as well as during

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the early hours following a heavy snow fall. This resulted in the area being able to be opened earlier to the public—this was and is greatly applauded by Alta's "Powder Hounds."

Sandahl retired as Alta's Snow Ranger in 1990. One of his lasting contributions was erecting a weather station on top of Cardiff Peak, elevation 10,500 feet above sea level. Using an antenna on the building, Binx formed the shape of a pine tree, with electric lights. During the Christmas holiday, the lights are turned on, adding to the festive spirit. Binx was particularly proud of the artificial tree and would comment that it was "the highest Christmas tree in the U.S." Throughout his years at Alta, Binx brought a great amount of personality, team building, and community support to both the highway and ski-area avalanche programs.

Alta Ski Area's first Snow Safety Director was a family friend of John and Jack Herbert's, a young ski patroller from Ogden, Utah, named Dave Hamre. Dave, with the help of the Snow Rangers, laid out the original avalanche-control routes that are still used today. He left Alta in the late 1970s and moved to Alaska where he still remains involved with snow safety work for Alyeska Ski Area, the Alaska Railroad, and Chugach Mountain Guides.



Snow Safety Director Onno Wieringa, circa 1979

Beginning in 1972, Alta Ski Area's current President and General Manager, Onno Wieringa, began work on Alta's ski patrol. Prior to coming to Alta, Wieringa served several years on the ski patrol at Bridger Bowl near Bozeman, Montana. Because of Wieringa's knowledge and interest in snow safety, he was named Alta Snow Safety Director when Dave Hamre left in 1978, a position he retained until taking the general manager reins from Chic Morton in 1988. Snow safety was then taken over by Titus Case, who to this day is assisted by his cohort, Dan "Howie" Howlett. They have continued to refine and evolve the Alta forecasting and control activities into a highly effective state-of-the-art program.

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Titus Case at Alta, April 2012. Inset image: Dan "Howie" Howlett adminishooting the Baldy Avalauncher, circa 2004

During the early years when Wieringa was Alta Snow Safety Director, he also worked on the ski patrol and lived in the Alta Forest Service Guard Station with Forest Service Snow Ranger Binx Sandahl. In 1998, he was credited by The Avalanche Review, published by the American Association of Avalanche Professionals, as building "one of the finest snow safety departments in the ski industry." This special expertise is still put to good use on the mountain during heavy storms at Alta. Onno is not one prone to stay put in his office during inclement weather, and he continues to work with the snow safety team and serves as a gunner on the 105mm rifle crew when they fire from one of his favorite vantage points on Alta's Peruvian Ridge.

Alta's ski patrol enjoys a strong reputation as being one of the finest in the country. The reason, in part, is because it has been active since the very early stages of Alta's ski development in the late 1930s and early '40s. At that time, most of the ski patrol efforts were on a part-time basis consisting of volunteer members of the Salt Lake Metropolitan Patrol, considered a sub-division of the National Ski Patrol System. Much of the early Utah-based snow safety training was conducted at Alta due to its rugged mountain terrain and significant snowfall during winter months.



Jim Shane, Monty Atwater & Harold Goodro, circa late 40's

On one occasion in 1945, a training exercise turned into an actual rescue effort. It occurred during April and was considered a routine Civil Defense exercise conducted by the Ski and Mountain Corps volunteers. The exercise involved dropping a special marker from a Civil Air Patrol Piper Cub in the Albion Basin area that was intended to mark the spot for a planned, emergency, test-recovery effort. Unfortunately, the small plane was unable to gain altitude after dropping into the Basin area and ended up stalling and crashing, injuring the pilot and his passenger. A full-blown rescue effort was immediately implemented, headed by Alta patrollers Harold Goodro and Jim Shane. Others on the rescue team included Sverre Engen, Chic Morton, Lee Steorts, Steve McDonald, Pete Peterson, and Larry Davenport.

Sverre Engen in his book, *Skiing a Way of Life*, said that when they arrived at the crash scene with a rescue toboggan, "there was one man standing outside the plane with a bloody nose and some missing teeth. The pilot was in the plane unconscious. He had to be transported carefully on the toboggan. The report we got later was that his back had been injured in the crash, but it was a miracle that they had lived through it. No doubt they were saved because the snow was so deep that it cushioned their landing."

The first "full-time" ski patrolman at Alta was Larry Moss, hired in 1947. He was followed by Gordon Allcott who replaced Moss in early 1948. By the fall of 1948, the full-time ski patrol at Alta had grown to four, consisting of Tom Foley, Harold Goodro, Dave Sheldon, and Allcott.

Throughout the early ski-development years at Alta, two ski patrolmen were considered the "key" individuals on all significant rescue efforts. They were the late Jim Shane and Harold Goodro. The book *For the Love of Skiing—A Visual History* by Alan Engen, described Jim Shane as "a quiet, gentle giant of a man, regarded by many as one of Utah's strongest men. He saved several lives single-handedly and is perhaps one of the Intermountain region's most unsung heroes. . . . Harold Goodro was one of America's true mountain men, a legend in skiing and mountain climbing, and probably the best known of early Utah ski patrollers." Together, these two individuals were responsible for numerous inclement weather mountain rescues throughout the Intermountain region, not just at Alta, and are deserving of the many commendations they received during their lifetimes.

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By the late 1960s, the Alta Powder News reported Alta's ski patrol growing to 11 full time professionals and an additional 29 patrollers who served part time. This was further expanded in the mid 1970s by highlighting in the Alta Powder News eighteen full-time professional ski patrol individuals, including Julia Page, one of, if not Alta's first woman member of the patrol.

Two of the members of Alta's ski patrol in the 1970s have moved on to become key ski area managers. They are Onno Wieringa, Alta Ski Area's current General Manager and Chuck English, who oversees mountain operations at Utah's Deer Valley Resort.

In 1980, Alta expanded its winter ski-patrol operations by adding its first avalanche dog to the force. Je Yu was her name, derived from the Indian word meaning treasure.

The value of having trained avalanche dogs in and around Alta has paid large dividends over the years. Because time is critical for individuals when buried in an avalanche, animals such as Je Yu proved themselves extremely valuable in search operations in finding the victim under the snow. Other canines followed Je Yu over the years including Jingo, Crystal, Emma, Lucy, Stella, Binx, Riki, Jake, Jamie, Ross, and Minga. Two of the primary trainers and handlers of these wonderful animals over the years have been Barbara Altum and the late Dan O'Connor. Alta has indeed been very fortunate to have these dedicated individuals as primary members of the search and rescue teams.



Ben Meyerson with 3 of Alta's Avi Dogs, circa 2009

While much more could and perhaps should be written about Alta's snow safety and ski patrol history, what should be remembered is the primary role various individuals played in the development of snow safety procedures at Alta, many of which became the source for books, such as *The ABCs of Avalanche Safety* by Ed Lachapelle and *Avalanche Hunters* by Montgomery M. Atwater. What also needs to be underscored is that the snow safety programs and ski patrol efforts at Alta comprise only a part of the

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important elements involved in running a ski area, such as lift operations, snow grooming, building maintenance, ticketing, food services, medical care, and ski school, to name but a few.

Alta has just completed its 70th winter season as a ski area—a justifiable record to be proud of with a rich history worth telling. However, we should remember that “we all live downstream of history and upstream of the future.” When asked recently about the most pressing issues facing the avalanche programs at Alta, Onno Wieringa said, “the growth and associated pressures from Salt Lake are slowly closing in on use of artillery as a control tool. Technologies used in other places and creative ideas are going to someday replace artillery at Alta. What hasn’t changed are the great abundance of Alta powder, the wonderful steep skiing terrain, and the essential 11 contributory factors in the formation of avalanche hazard. Snow safety operations are going to be around for a long time.”

History of Alta’s Ski Schools 1938-2013

As part of Alta’s 70th anniversary, the 2008-09 ski season also marks the 60th anniversary of the Alf Engen Ski School. For all of the 70 years, Alta skiers have enjoyed the continuous presence of ski schools. During the past 6 decades, Alta has retained the name Alf Engen Ski School in honor of legendary ski jumper, ski racer, and ski teacher—Alf Engen. Alf directed the ski school from 1948 to 1989. Previously, the ski school carried the names Alta Ski School, Dick Durrance Ski School, and Sverre Engen Ski School. In the early days, the ski school operated as an independent enterprise, separate from the Alta Ski Lift Company, with its own operating permit issued by the U.S. Forest Service. In the early 1960s, with the encouragement of the Forest Service so that it could have a single point of contact within the ski area, Alf and S. Joe Quinney merged the ski school into the Alta Ski Lifts Company.



Alta's first full-time ski patrol, circa 1948

The following individuals have served as the ski school directors at Alta:

Years	Name
1938-39	Karl Fahrner
1940-41	Bert Jensen
1941-42	Dick Durrance*
1942-43	Friedl Pfeifer*
1943-44	Martin Fopp
1944-45	Karl Fahrner
1945-48	Sverre Engen*
1948-89	Alf Engen*
1989-92	Paul "P.J." Jones
1992-99	Alan Engen*
1999-present	David "Hoopa" Robinson

* U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame inductee

Karl Fahrner – 1st and 6th Director

Only one person has held the Alta ski school directorship two times—German born Karl Fahrner. He headed the ski school at Alta in the 1938-39 and 1944-45 ski seasons. Fahrner was a respected European alpine ski racer prior to coming to the U.S. and placed high in U.S. alpine competitions. He started the first organized skiing in Ellicottville, New York, in 1936.

In a Salt Lake Tribune article dated December 18, 1938, Fahrner describes an early morning ski outing at Alta:

“It was a crispy morning, one that made one feel he is alive. Never in all my skiing days have I experienced such snow. Let me say here that 20 years of skiing in competition have taken me to all the well-known ski resorts of Europe and this country. Two years ago, I spent four weeks in the Canadian Rockies, sometimes called the North American Alps. And never have I found conditions to exceed those of last Sunday at Alta.”

Bert Jensen – 2nd Director

Bert Jensen headed the ski school operations at Alta in 1940-41. Not much is recorded regarding his tenure as ski school director. What is of record, via a Forest Service Special Use Permit dated 9 January 1941, indicates that Jensen had to operate within very strict guidelines. The Salt Lake Winter Sports Association was granted permission to conduct ski teaching operations, but limited teaching to “an area approximately 400'x 600' covering high street south of Little Cottonwood Creek in southeast portion of Alta.” This area

- References:
- Avalanche Handbook (1978) by Ronald I. Perla and M. Martinelli, Jr.
 - Modern Avalanche Rescue (April, 1968) by Edward R. LaChapelle
 - Skiing a Way of Life (1976) by Sverre Engen
 - Avalanche Hunters by Montgomery M. Atwater
 - For the Love of Skiing—A Visual History (1998) by Alan K. Engen
 - The Forest Rangers by Monty Atwater
 - The Avalanche Review, Vol. 7, No. 3 dated December 1, 1988.
 - Ski Illustrated magazine, February 1948 – article titled “Cerberus of the Snows,” by Montgomery M. Atwater
 - The Utah Magazine, December 1946 – article titled In the “Wake of a Snowflake,” by F.C. Koziol



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included a rope tow installed in 1940 on the Rustler hillside near the current 180 Degree Bend.

Another restriction required that "ski classes will yield the right-of-way on public runs to other skiers where there is chance of conflict between them" and that "freedom will be allowed the school in the use of public runs to the extent that it can be exercised without interference with general skiing." These restrictions illustrate a few of the unique challenges faced by the ski school at Alta in the early 1940s.

Dick Durrance – 3rd Director

Dick Durrance attended Dartmouth College in the 1930s and won the U.S. Collegiate championship all four years in both alpine and Nordic ski disciplines. During active competition, he retired the prestigious Harriman Cup at Sun Valley, Idaho, winning it three times. He was the national alpine slalom champion 1935 and the national downhill champion in 1937 and 1940. He was the national alpine combined champion in 1937, 1939, and 1940. In 1936, he was named a member of the U.S. Winter Olympic Ski Team.

In 1940, he married Miggs Jennings, a winning racer in her own right. They moved to Utah and he took over the ski school operations at Alta, succeeding Bert Jensen. During his time at Alta, he not only headed the Dick Durrance Ski School, but also helped build the Alta Lodge and headed Alta's training of 150 paratroopers of the 503rd Parachute Battalion, which pre-dated the start of the famed 10th Mountain Division, headquartered in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

In the early 1940s, Dick Durrance developed a special pin which carried his namesake. Many of those who took ski lessons from Durrance received this pin as a special acknowledgement of participation. Today, the rare Durrance ski-school pins are treasured as a collector's item. During his time as Alta's Ski School Director, he developed a deep-powder skiing technique called the "dipsy-doodle." Durrance was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1958 and was named a founder of American skiing in 1994.

Friedl Pfeifer – 4th Director

Although Friedl Pfeifer's skiing career is legendary, his time at Alta as a ski school director was limited to one ski season due to the start of World War II—1942-43. At the end of the 1942-43 ski season, he enlisted in the U.S. Army, and joined the famed 10th Mountain Division. He served in Italy and was seriously wounded in action, losing one lung.

Pfeifer was born in St. Anton am Arlberg, Austria and came to the United States after winning the famed Arlberg-Kandahar downhill and slalom championships in 1936. His ski-teaching experience began in St. Anton under the tutelage of Hannes Schneider.

He won the U.S. national slalom championship in 1939 and 1940. Besides being an outstanding competitor, he coached the U.S. Women's Ski Team in 1956. In the 1960s, Pfeifer ran the Aspen Ski School and started the International Professional Ski Racers Association. He was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1980.

Martin Fopp – 5th Director

Martin Fopp headed the Alta ski school during the 1943-44 ski season. Swiss born, he came to the U.S. in 1940 with an established reputation as a top European ski racer, having won the 1938 Parsenn Derby in Switzerland. In the early 1940s, he managed the ski school at Timberline until World War II closed the ski area. In 1942, he won the U.S. National Downhill Championship at Badger Pass, Yosemite, California, edging out Alf Engen who placed second.

His father, Lieni Fopp, was a prominent hotel owner in Davos, Switzerland. He is credited for financing the world's first J-bar cable lift in Davos in 1934. His J-bar revolutionized European lift design.

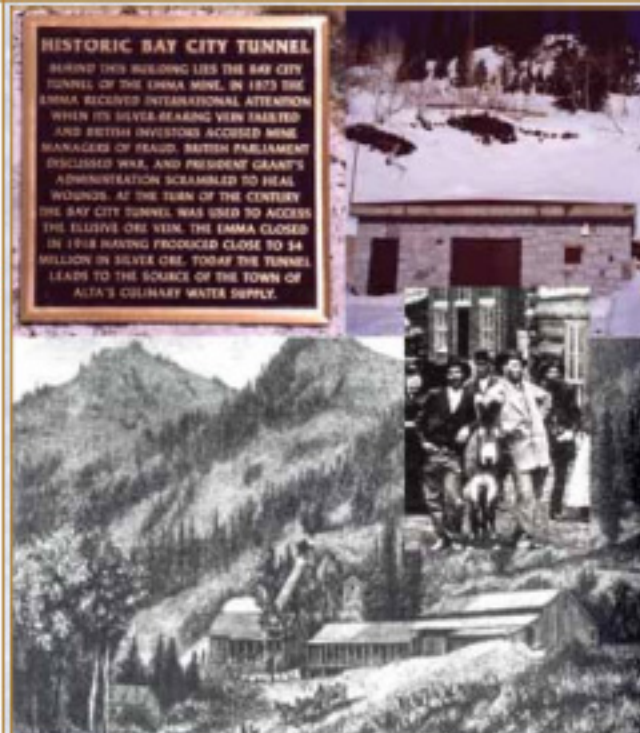
Sverre Engen – 7th Director

Sverre Engen took over as ski school director following his early years as Alta's (and America's) first designated Forest Service Snow Ranger. Sverre ran the ski school for several years and authored a book titled, *Ski With Sverre*. In 1948, he turned the ski school over to his older brother, Alf, who had just returned from Europe as coach of the U.S. Winter Olympic Ski Team. Sverre went on to become a successful skiing filmmaker and partner in the initial construction and managing of the Rustler Lodge at Alta in the late 1940s through the mid 1950s.

During World War II, Sverre served with the 10th Mountain Division. He was awarded the Silver Merit Star (1945) by the National Ski Patrol for outstanding service, and he was inducted into the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1971. In 1976, he authored a second book titled, *Skiing a Way of Life* which highlighted his lifetime ski experiences... now regarded as a collectors item.

Alf Engen – 8th Director

For the next 41 years (1948 to 1989), Alf directed ski school operations at Alta. According to Alf's wife, Evelyn, the first few years of ski school operation were very challenging. Business was slow and both Alf and Evelyn had to put most of the revenue received in the ski school back into the business to help it grow. After the 1948-49 ski season, Alf hired his first full-time ski instructor—Tom Foley. Tom had been working on the ski patrol at Alta.



Snow Job at the Emma Mine

The Bay City Tunnel entrance is located a short walk east from the Snowpine Lodge in the Town of Alta, Utah. The Bay City Tunnel leads to the Emma Mine that is perhaps one of the most infamous mines in the annals of American history. According to the *Mining & Scientific Press*, September 30, 1873, "the operations of unscrupulous speculators in mining property, in Utah, are doing, and have done, more harm to the mining interests...than can well be computed in dollars and cents."

What has proved to be a historic fact was that many individuals, with marginal integrity, tried to swindle each other over the Emma Mine. At the end, some English and Scottish stockholders, far from Alta, were left with a worthless hole in the ground for which they had paid millions to obtain. A comprehensive account can be found in the book *A Hole in the Ground With a Liar at the Top*, by Dan Plazak, © 2006 by The University of Utah Press. However, the following highlights the infamous story.

In 1868, two prospectors, James F. Woodman and Robert B. Chisholm, discovered scatterings of high-quality silver ore on the hillside just above the Bay City Tunnel. Not long after the discovery, Woodman and Chisholm began a 6-month-long drilling of a shaft that penetrated 93 vertical feet of solid rock. At that depth, they hit a rich vein of silver ore in early 1869.

By way of explanation, this part of the Wasatch Range, focused at the top of Little Cottonwood Canyon, contained several rich ore bodies found in

The following year, Alf became acquainted with Junior Bounous and began giving him alpine ski lessons. Bounous at that time was a noted local Nordic competitive skier and wanted to improve his alpine downhill skiing abilities, especially in deep powder snow. Alf obliged and taught Junior how to ski well—very well. They quickly developed a strong and lasting friendship that resembled a father/son relationship. Junior’s quiet and humble demeanor impressed Alf, along with Junior’s ability to quickly master the ski pointers that Alf offered.

Bounous began teaching in the Alf Engen Ski School, soon becoming Alf’s first Assistant Director, serving from 1948 to 1958. Bounous left Alta in 1958 when he was offered the job of Ski School Director at Sugarbowl in California. He returned to Utah in 1967 and directed the Ski School at Timp Haven (now Sundance), then became the Director at Snow Bird in 1971. Since 1992, he has served as Director of Skiing at Snowbird, just 2 miles away from where he started his teaching career. Junior became a major contributor to the development of skiing in the U.S.

In 1964, Alf promoted Max Lundberg to the position of Assistant Director in the Alf Engen Ski School. Lundberg retained that position until he left Alta in 1986 to take a position as Director of the Professional Ski Instructors of America Educational Foundation. While Lundberg was in the ski school, he designed the very attractive Engen Ski School instructor pin, which is still in use today. Following Lundberg, Lynn “Nic” Nichol took over as Assistant Director, and retained that title until Alf retired as director at the end of the 1988-89 ski season and became Alta’s first Director of Skiing.

Alf was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1956. He was named one of the founders of American skiing in 1994, and he was selected as Utah’s overall “Athlete of the 20th Century” in late 1999.

Kenneth Paul “P.J.” Jones – 9th Director

Paul “P.J.” Jones, an exceptionally fine skier and ski teacher, was named director of the Alf Engen Ski School in April of 1989 when Alf was named Alta’s first Director of Skiing. P.J. took the reins of the ski school with over 20 years experience in the ski industry starting in the mid 1960s at Bridger Bowl, Montana. Among other accomplishments, he was a graduate of the Austrian National Ski Instructors Academy in St. Anton, Austria and a three term member of the Professional Ski Instructors of America (PSIA) National Demonstration Team. Prior to arriving at Alta, he held the position of General Manager of Buttermilk Mountain in Aspen, Colorado.

While director of the Alf Engen Ski School (1989-92), he divided his considerable energies between updating the ski school operations and helping to standardize the PSIA Intermountain Division material and testing procedures.

Alan Engen – 10th Director

Alf’s elder son, Alan, took the helm of the ski school from 1992 through 1998. His skiing and ski teaching roots run deep. He virtually grew up in Alta’s ski school operations from the time his father assumed the directorship in 1948. Alan began skiing at age 2 and competing in 1950 at age 9. His competitive career spanned 42 years ending in 1992 when he took over the directorship of the Alf Engen Ski School. Alan was five times Intermountain Ski Association Junior Champion and five times Intermountain Ski Association senior champion. He was a member and co-captain of the University of Utah Ski Team from 1959 to 1962 and was selected as a member of the U.S. All American Collegiate Ski Team in 1961-62. He placed second in the U.S. National Alpine (Downhill, Slalom, and Giant Slalom) Championships in 1960 and was third in the National Collegiate Athletic Ski Championships the same year. Alan also competed in the highest level of FIS (Federation of International Skiing) competition as a member of the United States CISM Ski Team in Europe during the 1964 and 1965 seasons, receiving several medals in World Cup competitions.

In the early 1980s, Alan again re-entered competitive skiing and won the United States Ski Association–Intermountain Division overall Masters series title six different years. He was named a “Legend of Utah Skiing” in 1988; inducted into the Utah Sports Hall of Fame in 1991 and the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 2004. In 1999, Alan was presented the “Outstanding Contribution Award” by the Intermountain Ski Areas Association for “outstanding efforts to further the sport of skiing.” He also received a “History Maker” award by the Utah Ski Archives in 2005. He was inducted into the University of Utah Athletes Crimson Club Hall of Fame in 2006, and in 2007 was named Utah’s “Best of State” as a professional athlete in Sports and Recreation.

As a ski teacher, Alan was first certified by the Intermountain Ski Instructors Association in the 1958-59 ski season. During his years as Director of the Alf Engen Ski School, Alan focused on continuing the ski school’s outstanding legacy; providing a sound historical record of Alta’s many skiing contributions since 1938; and in highlighting Utah’s rich ski history, via authoring two award winning books and founding a world class ski museum which carries his father’s namesake.

In 1999, Alan was named Alta’s second Director of Skiing, succeeding his father, and continued to serve in that position until April 2010 when he retired.

David “Hoopa” Robinson – 11th Director

The current Director of the Alf Engen Ski School is David “Hoopa” Robinson. Hoopa arrived at Alta in the fall of 1980 from New England, where he had 10 years of ski-industry experience. For the next 5 years, he worked at Alta as a full-time ski instructor and lived in company housing. The core of the crew who lived, skied, ate, and worked together in the 1980s all evolved to be first supervisors, then later directors and department heads of the Alta Ski Lifts Company. This group is still in place almost 30 years later. The lessons learned in the 1980s, the friendship, the teamwork, the hard work, the respect, and the love of the sport, molded the framework of how the Alta ski area operates today.

Hoopa had a special mentor at Alta—Alf Engen. “I was fortunate that I was able to spend a lot of time with Alf during my early years at Alta. We would ski, talk, and watch his old ski-jumping and powder-skiing movies. The thing I remember most is how proud Alf was of all things Alta. His ski school, of course, but also the ski area as a whole, the town of Alta, all the people he had skied with over the years, and all the great friendships he had developed. While looking over Alta from high places, he would often say that he had the greatest office in the world, surrounded by the world’s greatest people, and he was right.”

Hoopa states that the ski school mission is clear—“With a dedicated group of certified instructors and loyal support staff, we shall keep alive the original spirit and love of skiing as modeled by the founders of the Alta ski area and simultaneously we shall stay at the forefront of an evolving ski technology and teaching methodology so that the Alf Engen Ski School can help the Alta Ski Lifts Company and its guests remain at the center of the powder-skiing universe.”



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a limestone formation or along the contact zone between limestone and quartzite layers. These limestone belts cross most of the northern slopes above Alta and run northwest over the ridge to Days and Cardiff Forks and across Big Cottonwood Canyon. Many of the ore veins were very narrow, but others quite wide. The veins contained both very low and extremely high-grade ore, depending on the location.

In some places, the fissures open into large cavities, very much like caves and result in a very rich lode...the type that miners and promoters and speculators dream of. Such was the Emma lode that Woodman and Chisholm found. So reported, Emma's great ore chamber was 70 feet long, 70 feet high, and 35 feet wide. The ore was removed so rapidly from this chamber that the structural integrity of the chamber was seriously degraded. Woodman and Chisholm's actual time in the mine was relatively short lived...which was by design.

The name "Emma" came from Chisholm's youngest child and only daughter, who, at that time, was 10 years old. Emma often wrote her father begging him to come home to his "dear Emma." However, when he did not return in timely fashion, she took matters into her own hands and traveled from her home in Illinois to visit her father at Alta. In 1873, she wrote to other family members telling of her Alta experiences, including finding Alta miners smoking a brand of cigars called "Little Emma" and that they actually had a picture of her on the cigar box. The Emma Silver Mining shares were called *Emma's, Emma shares*.

In 1871, the mining claim was surveyed for a patent and a company was formed named the American Emma Mining Company. During this time, the Emma Mine produced 31 carloads of ore so rich that even after hauling it by wagon to Salt Lake City...then by rail to New Jersey, it still turned a grand profit, making Emma at that time the foremost mine in Utah. It was reported that at the Emma Mine's high point, daily shipments of ore worth \$5,000 was extracted (big money in those days).

Within a few months, the American Emma Mining Company was sold to a New York firm, quickly followed by a subsequent sale to a British consortium of promoters and speculators, most of whom were "scallywags." To raise capital for expanding the mine, promoters made several exaggerated claims about the size of the silver ore vein. At that time, the Emma Mine had produced some \$3 million worth of ore; however, because of worries that the vein would shortly play out, the promoters needed to convince prospective investors that it would continue to produce high levels of silver ore well into the future. To do this the promoters hired a professor of chemistry at Yale, named Benjamin Stilliman Jr., to examine the mine... resulting in a very optimistic finding that the Emma ore body was indeed a "true mineral vein" which would extend much further into the earth than had been mined up to that time. This proved to be totally unsupported and, in fact, what the investors ultimately put their money into was nothing more than an empty shell. Serious technical problems ensued, one of which included unwanted water in the mineshaft, resulting in no promised expansion of ore production. The plum had been picked and eaten. By 1872, no *low-hanging fruit* remained and the value of Emma stock had been dramatically reduced, causing an international uproar.

British investors became highly incensed. They made charges of fraud and swindle, which focused substantial negative attention on those who owned or had owned the Emma Mine. Lawsuits and counter lawsuits flew on both sides of the ocean at a rapid pace, resulting in a full-blown U.S. Congressional investigation. Ultimately, a 879-page report was produced which basically exonerated the principals of the Emma Mine. However, negative feelings at home and abroad hovered over the mine and its owners for many years to follow. Low esteem of the scandal-plagued President Ulysses S. Grant administration at that time further contributed to decline in value of the Emma Mine stock. This in turn caused the reputation of virtually all American stocks in London to fall.

Four plus decades later, in 1916, the American Emma Mining Company, Ltd. initiated several new drillings out of the Bay City Tunnel. These drillings resulted in about 10,400 tons of ore being produced and sold to the U.S. Smelting and Refining Company, which had built a refinery at the mouth of Little Cottonwood Canyon. However, within two years, the quality and amount of ore from the Emma Mine declined so much that active mining was permanently discontinued. All that remained was a worthless hole in the ground.

Today, the Emma Mine serves as the principal source of water for the Town of Alta... but that is a story for a future issue of the *Alta Powder News*.



Detail from illustration of the Emma mine made in the early 1870s



Keith Lange in flight at the Alta gelande circa 1965

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 *geländesprung*, 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 *geländesprung* 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 sidelines, 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



The Alta National Gelände Trophy

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Engen. Many photos have captured these ski legends and others performing the art of gelande jumping.

In the early 1960s, interest in making gelande jumping into a competitive sport began to surface. Most of the skiers doing gelande 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 gelande 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 gelande 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 gelande tournament 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, Ron Baar and the late Jon S. Engen, Alf Engen's younger son. Jon Engen's form was so good, there was a special Alta gelande medal which carried his image..

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,



The Engen brothers perform at the Landes jump dedication on November 28, 1948 (Inset: Cover brochure for Landes Hill dedication)

History of the Landes Memorial Ski Jump

Following World War II, the interest in skiing was again building in the Intermountain region. During the war years (1942 – 1946), there had been little ski jumping activity since many of the jumpers were involved in active military service. Storied Ecker Hill, near Park City, which became one of the most famous jumping hills in the country in the 1930s, was rarely used during those years. However, beginning in 1946, the idea for a 40 meter jumping facility at Alta, Utah began. It was to become one of the first significant movements to resurrect ski jumping in Utah after the war years. The hill was funded mostly through a \$10,000 gift from a well known Salt Lake businessman, Herbert D. Landes. Mr. Landes decided in 1947 that a ski jump would be the most appropriate memorial to his son, Robert J. Landes who lost his life in action aboard a destroyer during the W.W. II Philippine invasion on December 11, 1944. Robert was a 22 year old Ensign in the U.S. Naval Reserve at the time, but before entering the service, he frequented Alta as an avid skier and especially enjoyed jumping off cornices and natural terrain bumps on the hillsides of Alta during the late 30s and early 40s.

William J. O'Conner, Salt Lake Winter Sports Association president during the mid 1940s, organized a committee of local ski clubs to carry out the work of building the hill. Famed ski jumper and 1948 U.S. Olympic Ski Team Coach, Alf Engen, served as construction advisor. Formal announcement of the hill's construction was made by Lee Irvine, Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce winter sports committee chairman, in August, 1948. In his comments to the press, he stated that "jumps on the new hill would fall somewhere between the A and B jumps at Ecker Hill which should allow average jumps of

...continued on page 16, left column.

THIRD ANNUAL NATIONAL GELANDE CONTEST



Photo by Tom Steinhilber, The Province Lodge

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Alta gelande poster featuring Jon Engen, circa 1967

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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Among the jump's most ardent supporters was Alta's first self proclaimed mayor, George H. Watson. Watson was a very colorful individual who spent most of his life at Alta as a miner and prospector. It was through the mayor that 700 acres of land at Alta was donated to the Forest Service so that a ski area could be started in the late 1930s. The actual jumping site location was part of the mayor's old mining claim which he established in the early 1900s.



Alf Engen jumping on November 28, 1948

The Landes Memorial Hill dedication was held on Sunday, November 28, 1948. Attending the dedication activities were Utah Governor Herbert B. Maw; Ike Armstrong, Utah football coach; and Dr. N.P. Nielson, head of the University of Utah's department of physical education. The dedication jump featured on the official program, was made by the famous Engen brothers, Alf, Sverre, and Corey Engen who performed a triple side-by-side leap. In mid air, the brothers released

roses in honor of Bob Landis. The longest jumps of the day were made by Alf Engen who registered jumps of 165, 168, and 181 feet. The 181 foot leap stood as the official hill record until March 5, 1961 when Chris Selbeck, a Norwegian attending the University of Denver, flew 191 feet in an official sanctioned tournament.

The Landes Memorial Jumping Hill continued to be the site of many fine tournaments between the years 1949 through the late 1970s, including a number of Intermountain ski championships, the National Junior Ski Jumping Championship, and the professional gelande ski jumping competition. In addition, every year a perpetual trophy was awarded to the top jumpers in each class of the classic Landes Memorial Jumping Tournament. One of the perpetual trophies was ultimately retired by Alan Engen when he won the tournament three consecutive years in the 1950s. Jumpers would come from all around for this particular event because it carried prestige similar to the Ecker Hill events. The hill offered a good spectator vantage point from either the Snowpine Lodge or outside on the parking lot and many ski jumping enthusiasts came to watch.



Four time Landes Hill winner, Alan Engen circa 1959

Some of the other early U.S. Olympic skiers who jumped at Landes Hill and went on to National Ski Hall of Fame honored status included Corey Engen, Devereaux "Dev" Jennings, Dick Movitz and Jack Reddish. One other skier who jumped on the hill over the years included Dick Simon, who perhaps was the first to fly 200 feet. Unfortunately, he touched the snow with his hand in the landing so the jump could not be counted as a hill record. Dick left ski jumping in the mid 1960s and took up race car driving. He went on to become a nationally known Indy sports car driver and promoter. However, on December 8, 1968, Matz Jensen, a University of Utah All-American ski jumper (1965 & 67) did make a standing leap of 200 feet in competition which set a new hill record on that hill. It was never exceeded and the hill was discontinued for ski jumping in May 1988.

The old hill still stands and can be seen with the take-off in tact. However, the judges stand has been removed and there exists a high tech transfer tow which runs across the outrun making the hill unusable for ski flying purposes.

Bill Levitt - Alta's First "Elected" Mayor (1917-2009)



In the Who's Who of Alta over the past half century, the name William "Bill" Levitt stands among the first rank. Although not a native to Utah, as he once said, "I am one of Utah's most loyal patriots." Bill sadly passed away at his beloved Alta Lodge on December 29, 2009, while enjoying the company of his many guests.

Levitt, born February 18, 1917, started his skiing interest in the early 1930s.

At age 14 while at scout winter camp in New York State, he strapped on a friend's pair of old wooden skis, without metal edges, and proceeded to slide down a sloped roadway

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leading to a lake covered with ice. Says Levitt, "I must have gone a quarter of a mile across the lake before I came to a stop. I thought this was the greatest thing that had ever happened to me. I went back up the hill and tried it again, but this time something went wrong and I fell head first into a snow bank. That was my introduction to the sport of skiing."

Many years went by before Levitt tried skiing again. His second experience was with a business associate at a small area called Big Bromley in the mid 1950s. After getting outfitted, he took his first ski lessons and became hooked. Shortly after, he and his wife decided to go west and try skiing over the Thanksgiving holiday. Their plans were to go to Aspen, which had marginal snow conditions that year. Friedl Pfeifer, who was at that time the ski school director at Aspen, recommended that they go to Alta instead. The Levitts followed Pfeifer's suggestion in 1954 and so began a long-lasting love affair with that location high in the towering Wasatch Mountains of Utah. As Levitt tells the story, "I had to make a choice, buy United Airlines so I could afford to continue coming to Alta on a frequent basis or purchase the Alta Lodge. I decided to do the latter and bought the lodge in 1959 from J Laughlin."

Alta incorporated as a township in 1970, largely due to a growing need to gain United States Federal funding to construct a sewer line linking the town to the Salt Lake Valley's sewer system. Levitt was elected the town's president in 1971 until 1975 when the Utah Legislature changed the designation from President to Mayor—at which time he was re-elected, becoming Alta's first elected Mayor. The only other person who carried that title was George Watson who self-appointed himself as Mayor in the late 1930s.

Also, during his tenure as Mayor of Alta, he was involved in overseeing the planting of over 2,500 trees, and was a member of the Tourism Planning Commission. When reflecting on his many contributions, perhaps his greatest legacy has been in his firm resolve to keep Alta protected from never ending demands for commercial development.

Bill Levitt was Alta's Mayor from 1972 through 2005. His contributions have and continue to have a lasting impact on the Town of Alta. Under his guidance, the Town of Alta gained a fire department, a small police force, a community center and a modern communications center that handles emergencies on a 24-hour 7-day-a-week basis.

...continued on page 17, right column..





These soldiers prepared for winter warfare, but never saw battles in the snow. However, in Italy they experienced ferocious battles against well-entrenched German soldiers in the rugged mountains of Italy and became the most decorated U.S. unit in World War II.

Winter Warfare Training of the 503RD Parachute Battalion at Alta, Utah, 1942

The 1942 training of the 503rd Parachute Battalion at Alta, Utah, in 1942 has been all but forgotten. Let us remember it. In the fall of 1941, U.S. Army Colonel Jack Tappen, stationed in Washington, D.C., contacted Dick Durrance at Alta, Utah. Durrance at that time was running the ski school as well as managing the Alta Lodge, which had opened during the 1940-41 ski season. Colonel Tappen knew of Durrance's reputation as a famous ski racer, but he had never met him. Colonel Tappen was interested in training military personnel for winter warfare.



According to Brigadier General Edward H. Thomas, retired, all skis were wooden, most without steel edges, and about 7 feet 3 inches long.

In 1941, the famed 10th Mountain Division Ski Troops had not yet been formed. Tappen's experiment was visionary in nature. However, The War Department had determined that the United States would likely be involved in active European war conflict, and, if that happened, certainly some part of the conflict would involve the high Alps in wintertime. Specially trained military personnel who could ski would be of high importance.

Therefore, Colonel Tappen asked if Dick Durrance would be interested in training a relatively

large group of parachutists from Fort Benning, Georgia, who had never been on skis. Some, in fact, had never seen snow! Durrance accepted Tappen's request, but he needed a cadre of instructors to do the job ahead. To solve that problem, he contacted some of his prior racing buddies, including Walter Prager, Sep Hannah, Barney McLean, Gordon Wren, Art Johansen, Bob Skinner, Alex Baer, Hugh Bauer, Bill Redlin, Henry Simoneau, and his brother, Jimmy.

Starting in mid-January 1942 and for 6 weeks, approximately 175 paratroopers from Company B of the 503rd Battalion trained at Alta under the direction of Dick Durrance and his instructor staff. The winter warriors were billeted near the airport in Salt Lake City, but every day, regardless of the weather, military trucks transported the soldiers to Alta under the command of Lt. Colonel Arthur F. Gorham (was later killed in action in Sicily).



These instructors taught the ski troops at Alta. Ski School Director Dick Durrance stands at the far left

The Rock Shelter (extensively rebuilt and now known as the Snowpine Lodge) was the base headquarters for the paratroopers while they trained at Alta. The War Department

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Levitt, in addition to his mayoral duties, was a founding member of the Utah Ski Association and served as President for 2 years. He served on the organization's Board of Directors Executive Committee during the mid- to late-1970s. He was also appointed to the Board and served as President of the Utah League of Cities and Towns, and received the prestigious title of "Utah's Outstanding Mayor" by the Utah League of Cities and Towns. For his outstanding contributions to the promotion of winter sports, he was inducted into the Utah Tourism Hall of Fame in 1988.

In addition to running day-to-day operations of the Alta Lodge with his wife, Mimi, he was an active member of the Professional Ski Instructors Association—Intermountain Division, and participated as a certified ski instructor in the Alf Engen Ski School. For his years of continuing significant support to the ski school, Alf Engen awarded him ski school "honorary status" in the mid-1970s.

Levitt's reign as Alta's Mayor lasted 34 years and is the longest span of time of any mayor in Utah's history. Throughout his years of dedicated service, Levitt chose to limit his annual mayoral salary to \$1.00. Tom Pollard, Alta's current elected mayor and Bill's replacement, gave this comment: "Bill Levitt's passion for the job and his dedication to the community is something I hope to match—but it will be a daunting task to adequately fill his shoes." That it will... and his passing leaves a hole in the Alta community that will remain for many years to come.



Bill Levitt outside of the Alta Lodge

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(now the Department of Defense) made a military film highlighting the training of the ski troops at Alta, Parachutists on Skis. Part of that film can be viewed in Alan Engen's video For the Love of Skiing: A Snapshot of Alta Ski History.



Uniforms used by the paratroopers for the training at Alta were olive green on one side and white on the reverse side.

Durrance divided the soldiers into ten classes, approximately 20 skiers assigned to each instructor. Over a 6-week period, the instructors proceeded to teach the paratroopers all the basics of skiing from waxing techniques to executing turns down the mountainous terrain at Alta. Some were injured in the process; however, according to Durrance, "the end of that winter we came to the conclusion that maybe a third of them would become pretty good skiers, the middle third could get by, and the remaining third had better stay in the paratroopers and forget it."



Ski Troops of the 503rd Parachute Battalion practice with winter gear at Alta, circa 1942

negative since no airborne infantry winter warfare unit was ever activated. To skate out on the thin ice of conjecture, I'd guess that at least one reason was the number of ski injuries we suffered. Contributing to these injuries was the training drilled into paratroopers to tumble on landing as well as the basic 'devil may care' attitude of the airborne soldier."

Whether the training at Alta was successful or not, what did happen shortly thereafter as the formation of the famed Tenth Mountain Division, started initially at Fort Lewis in Washington State. Later it moved to Camp Hale in Colorado. The Tenth Mountain Division troops distinguished themselves and became the most decorated division in World War II. Many books and articles have been written about their heroic feats. The Colorado Ski Museum located in Vail, Colorado, has an entire section dedicated to the Tenth Mountain Division. It should also include the 1942 training of the 503rd Parachute Battalion at Alta, Utah.

Instructor Sel Hannah, gives a soldier of the 503rd parachute battalion a lesson in waxing in front of the "Rock Shelter" at Alta, Utah circa January 1942



The extensive training included many hikes up and skiing down steep mountainsides, overnight sessions on the mountain, and parachute jumps that landed in the snow. Overall success of the winter training experiment at Alta was somewhat questionable. In the words of Brigadier General Edward Thomas, "While no conclusion was ever announced, we assumed that it was

negative since no airborne

Alta's Future - a 1938 Perspective

Salt Lake City businessmen to form the Salt Lake City Winter Sports Association. Quinney and the other businessmen wanted to develop Alta from an almost completely abandoned mining town into a ski area for the people who lived in the greater Salt Lake area.

From a strictly financial perspective, no sound businessman would invest in Alta's future. Several very difficult conditions made Alta's financial future highly problematic:

- The world-wide Great Depression was in full force and not likely to end for years to come. Jobs and money were hard to come by. People who had jobs were the lucky ones.
- Few people could afford the luxury of skiing. Ski equipment and clothing were expensive, uncomfortable, and ill-suited for their tasks.
- The steep, uphill road from the Salt Lake Valley to Alta made access difficult and sometimes impossible—especially during the winter skiing months. The avalanche danger on the road to Alta and in the ski area during the winter was sometimes dangerously high.
- No suitable public facilities existed—no lodges to stay overnight, no restaurants or cafes to buy hot food, no public shelter to escape from winter storms.

Regardless of these conditions, a rope tow was operating successfully at Alta during the mid-1930s and Salt Lake City Winter Sports Association led by Chairman Stewart Cosgriff, S. Joe Quinney, and others had decided that the task of developing Alta as a ski resort—with a chairlift in Collins Gulch—could and would be done. Only four chair lifts had been built before—three in Sun Valley, Idaho and one in New England.

Mack Corbett Muses About Alta's Future in 1938

Mack Corbett, a staff writer for the Deseret News, wrote the following article. In it he describes and discusses the problems and opportunities of developing a ski resort at Alta. Under the heading "Alta's Future," Corbett specifically focused on the difficulties that the Salt Lake City Winter Sports Association was having in getting the original Collins Lift operational. This first chairlift in Utah was scheduled to begin operation in the late fall of 1938. However,

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it did not begin operating until 15 January 1939, after Corbett's article was written and before this article was published in the 1939 Utah Skiing Manual.

In the first paragraph, Corbett predicted that the first Collins chairlift would haul people up the mountain only on some "far-future day." However, in a positive tone, he noted the possibility that Alta "perhaps" might become the greatest skiing center near a large population center in the United States and Europe:

On the evidently far-future day when the Alta chairlift [Collins] totes its first human cargo up the steep sides of Collins Gulch, that portion of the Wasatch Mountains hugging Salt Lake Valley will take its place in the winter sports world as perhaps the greatest skischport [sic] area of its kind in close proximity [sic] to a large center of population in existence.

In the next two paragraphs, Corbett noted the much longer distances skiers in Colorado, California, the northwestern United States, and Europe had to travel to reach ski resorts:

Seventy-five miles is about the nether limit elsewhere when it comes to the distance of powder snow accessible to skiers in communities of 100,000 or more. That is Denver's nearest ski area. Skiers on the [California] coast and in the northwest [Oregon and Washington] have to travel farther than that, to our knowledge. The famous skiing fields of Scandinavia and Europe are said to be even more remote.

Corbett somewhat overstated the comforts of the "under-developed facilities" at Alta, the capabilities of the newly opened road to Alta (which then did not include the Alta Bypass Road), the continuing threat of avalanches (especially from Mount Superior), and the weekly bus service:

. . . Alta and Brighton—possessing unsurpassed though still somewhat undeveloped facilities for the most discriminating skier—are only 26 and 28 miles, respectively, from the heart of Salt Lake City and its 160,000 inhabitants. Wide highways, kept open all winter by county and Forest Service snowplows, provide swift and easy automobile transportation. So accessible in fact that regular weekly bus service has been established.

With a slight contradiction, Corbett then lamented that Brighton and Alta—even though they have earlier, better, and more snow than Sun Valley—did not have the necessary facilities to care for skiers and other tourists. Corbett mentioned Sun Valley's now well-known lodge and its operating chair lifts.

He also could have but chose not to mention Sun Valley's heated swimming pool, its ice skating rink, its horse-drawn sleighs, the Union Pacific's Pullman sleepers that regularly brought the rich and famous in comfort from far away places—for example, Hollywood. Corbett then laments the absence of facilities at Alta and Brighton, but praises them for their early-season snow:

Yet the true significance of these facts will not be realized nor appreciated until we have available such man-made facilities as have made Sun Valley a world-wide ski mecca with little more than expert publicity and timber-free slopes. It is a fact that you will find powder snow in the 8,000-foot basins of Alta and Brighton when Sun Valley's only setting is the black earth. The recent Inter-collegiate championships at the Idaho resort were a case in point.

Corbett then zinged and assigned blame unfairly to the Salt Lake City Winter Sports Association's bad management as the cause for the delayed opening of the Collins Lift. But he did note the partially built facilities that might be finished in a year's time—the winter ski season of 1939-40:

[At Alta] man-made resources consist of lifts and lodges. The Salt Lake Winter Sports Association has already taken laudable initiative in this regard. The [Snowpine] Lodge at Alta, not to omit another structure already partially completed by the Forest Service in the same basin, is projected and though it won't be ready this winter probably will before another twelve-month [sic] passes. The [Collins] Lift, one that does Sun Valley's Proctor Mountain credit, is completed to all outward appearances and was scheduled to commence operation several weeks ago.

By the fall of 1939 Sun Valley indeed had three chairlifts operating—one on Half-Dollar Mountain, one on Dollar Mountain, and one on Proctor Mountain—each longer and better than the last.

In Corbett's penultimate paragraph, he resumed carping about the mysterious construction delays of the Collins Lift:

What has delayed fruition of the \$11,000 [actual cost about \$19,000] multiple ski tramway is rapidly becoming "The Mystery of Alta." One report said that gears do not mesh. Another, that the clutch slips. Another, that the poles and cross-bars will not carry the load. Skiers meanwhile cross their fingers and fervently hope it is one of these mechanical deficiencies and not an engineering blunder that may necessitate months more delay while equipment is moved to attack the slopes at a lesser angle. Or, an engineering mistake that may require installation of additional power of prohibitive expense this winter.

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In his final paragraph, Corbett proposed a solution—find more shareholders who have money to invest in Alta. This would have been no easy task during the depth of the Great Depression:

If more shareholders are needed for the Winter Sports Association to bring the lift to working order, maybe the skiing public can provide more funds. In any case, the Association is invited, nay urged, to share its problem to the end [that] the Alta ski lift may commence operation pronto, if not sooner. Fun on skis undreamed of awaits the masses when the lift runs. Until that time, the sport's amazing progress hereabouts stands still. And when things stand still, they tend to retrogress.

Meanwhile back at Alta, Fred Speyer (most of you know of Fred's Slot), Marthinus Strand, and their crew struggled mightily with complex mechanical problems that no amount of money could quickly solve. With repeated Herculean efforts in wind, snow, and cold, they opened the lift to the public on 15 January 1939.

Regardless of the delayed opening, the construction and operation of the Collins Lift secured the future of Alta as a ski area. The Collins Lift figuratively lifted Alta from an abandoned mining town into a ski area



for the local people in the greater Salt Lake area and beyond.

In time as the Collins Lift was replaced/realigned three times, as other lifts were built that reached the tops of the mountains in Alta, as lodges and other facilities were completed, Alta has become internationally known, serving skiers from the greater Salt Lake Basin as originally intended and also serving skiers from many far away places with strange sounding names.

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Alta Timeline 1864-2013

THEN

1864 Fort Douglas soldiers and their wives discover silver in Alta during a picnic outing.

1865 The first verified claim is staked in Alta, directly across from the present day Peruvian Lodge.

1866 The Emma mine becomes embroiled in controversy. British investors accuse principals of fraud after silver-bearing ore disappears in a fault.

1870 Central City, the first community in the area, grows along Little Cottonwood Creek below present day Alta Peruvian Lodge. Population 216.

1871 Alta town site is established as an outgrowth of Central City. Town site located near present Albion Mt. 10 streets run east-west, 11 streets run north-south. Post office in Clabey & Read's General Store, the largest building in town.

1872 Alta's summer population grows to several thousand. 180 buildings occupy the town site. Storm on June 30th ends the 1871-1872 snow year.

1873 One of the earliest known recorded deeds gives Amanda Brown land in Alta. Silver is devalued; mining activity begins to decline. The Alta Independent and The Cottonwood Observer are published.

1875 A railroad to Alta is complete. Mules pull the trains up; gravity pulls them down, with a brave brakeman on board barely maintaining control.

1885 An avalanche in February destroys many buildings in town and deposits 50' of snow on Main Street. Over 15 are killed. Slide conditions worsened by deforestation of area for buildings and mine tunnel reinforcement.

1896 Utah becomes a state in January.

1904 Most individual mines are consolidated into one of three mining companies: Wasatch Mines, Alta United, and Michigan-Utah. Workers live in company buildings, at the mine, not in the old town site.

1916 Visitors to Alta stay at the Mattsin boarding house during the period.

1919 The Denver Rio-Grande completes a narrow-gauge railroad to Alta, replacing the old mule-drawn rail.

1920 With the depression, most mining businesses in Alta come to a grinding halt and the miners move on. One of Alta's few inhabitants, self-appointed "Mayor" George Watson, opens a small tourist business, known as the Alta Scenic Railway. He provides rides in the canyon on a jitney, (a car mounted on the old railroad tracks).

1922 Elbert Despain begins mail service at Alta in a two-ton truck mounted to a railcar. His mail delivery lasts 62 years during which time he delivers mail via horseback, buggy, sleigh, skis, mail truck, and station wagon.

1922 Jim and Elfriede Shane open the Goldminer's Daughter. New chairlift in the Albion Basin is built.

1930 Alta claims a whopping six registered voters.

1933 The US Forest Service retains famous skier Alf Engen to hike into Alta to determine if it's potential as a site for a future ski area. Skiers had been skiing the slopes around Alta before the ski area was built.

1935 The US Forest Service retains famous skier Alf Engen to hike into Alta to determine if it's potential as a site for a future ski area. Skiers had been skiing the slopes around Alta before the ski area was built.

1936 A road to Alta is constructed using the old railroad bed.

1937 "Mayor" George Watson deeds 2800 acres of surface rights to the Forest Service for development of a ski area. Local businessmen form The Salt Lake City Winter Sports Association. Among its members is long-time Alta supporter Joe Guinness. Fred Sawyer becomes the ski area's first general manager.

1938 Alta becomes a ski area because of the combined efforts of the Salt Lake Winter Sports Association, taken over by the Alta Ski Lifts Company, The US Forest Service, Utah State Road Commission, Salt Lake County and the Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce. The Salt Lake Winter Sports Association, a group of 100 businessmen, raises \$40,000 for the construction of the Collins chairlift.

1939 The old Solwell Store is relocated into the Snowpine Lodge and the original Watson Shelter is built. Collins lift begins operation on January 15, charging 25 cents a ride or a full-day pass for \$1.50. Steve Engen becomes the first Snow Ranger in America and, with his new wife Gene, conducts operations in Alta.

1939 The Alta Lodge opens for overnight accommodation to destination skiers. Eastern publisher J Laughlin begins a lifetime affiliation with what is to become the Alta Ski Lifts Company.

1941 In preparation for battle in the European mountains, Company B 503rd Parachute Battalion trains at Alta under the tutelage of Dick Durkin and his cadre of Ski School instructors. Alta's first ski patrol is formed. Among its early members are Jim Shane, Harold Goodro, Gene Shelton, Tom Foley and Gordon Accatt.

1944 The Rustler "J" bar is converted into the Peruvian single-chair lift and is used until the mid 1960's, then torn down.

1945 The Peruvian "J" bar is converted into a chairlift. It burns down in 1954 and is never rebuilt. Monty Alwaker becomes the new Snow Ranger in Alta.

1947 Thanksgiving Day, November 27, 1947, the Rustler Lodge opens. The Landes Ski Jump is constructed.

1948 The Peruvian Lodge opens. Alf Engen is named Ski School Director and helps found the Desert News Ski School. Monty Alwaker begins using Remel choppers for avalanche control work.

1949 The US Forest Service develops an avalanche Center at Alta. Alta was chosen because "this was the first true alpine ski area to be developed in the US and because detailed reports of snow-rides have been kept for the past 75 years." The center at Alta became the regional headquarters and processing base for Stevens Park, Washington and Breckford Park, Colorado.

1952 "Mayor" George Watson dies at Alta. Monty Alwaker receives permission to fire a small French canon chopper for avalanche control work. Remel is controlled by Snow 2 LaChapelle who studied at the Massachusetts Institute of Davis, Switzerland. LaChapelle studied avalanche slides and set up a European-style snow study plot. He also used CO₂, a German invention, as the first big slide causing avalanche victims in the US.

1954 Germania chair lift is constructed and becomes Alta's first double chair.

1959 Wildcat fixed-double chair lift is built.

1960 Original Our Lady of the Snows is built just north of the present-day Photohaus.

1962 Jim and Elfriede Shane open the Goldminer's Daughter. New chairlift in the Albion Basin is built.

1963 Alta hosts the first alpine Gelände ski jumping meet. It is won by Alf Engen's son, Alan.

1965 Alta bypass road is completed on land donated by the Engen's.

1967 Sugarloaf chair is built. The last mine of any appreciable size ends operations in Alta.

1968 Post office re-opens in Alta. The Chamber of Commerce is established by local business owners.

1969 Snow Ranger Bergt "Birox" Sandahl installs the first remote weather station on top of Cardiff Peak. Largely financed with his own money, most of the equipment was carried to the site by Sandahl and Ski Patrolman Hamilton Strayer.

1970 Alta is incorporated as a town. Lee Bronson is appointed president.

1971 Sewer line is constructed in Little Cottonwood Canyon.

1971 Bill Levitt becomes the first elected Mayor. Alta Central is established. The US Forest Service moves the avalanche Study Center to Fort Collins, CO. Ironically, in December, a huge avalanche struck the Alta Lodge filling the top floors with snow and depositing a Volkswagen Beetle on the roof.

1972 Bill Levitt becomes the first elected Mayor. Alta Central is established. The US Forest Service moves the avalanche Study Center to Fort Collins, CO. Ironically, in December, a huge avalanche struck the Alta Lodge filling the top floors with snow and depositing a Volkswagen Beetle on the roof.

1973 Alta's first library is started in the Snowpine Lodge.

1975 Alta Justice Court begins with Judge Steve H Stewart and Prosecutor Robert Maack for the first time since the 1870's.

1976 The Alta Volunteer Fire Department is started.

1976 Bars added to Sunnyside Lift. 2011 Bars added to Collins, Sugarloaf and Supreme Lifts.

1977 Former Alta Ski Lifts General Manager Chk. Morton dies on the 24th of July. Alf Engen dies on the 20th of July.

1977 Former Alta Ski Lifts General Manager Chk. Morton dies on the 24th of July. Alf Engen dies on the 20th of July.

1978 The Alta Fire Station is built.

1981 Ceceet & Supreme lifts are built.

1983 Albion Ticket Office is built. Alta receives 765" of snow during 1983-1984 season.

1985 Snowmaking infrastructure first started at Alta.

1986 Albion Day Lodge is constructed.

1986 Alta introduces it's new Axes RFID ticket system with gates.

1988 The new Watson Shelter is completed. The Germania and Collins chairs are replaced by the new Collins high speed detachable quad.

1991 Germania lift is upgraded from a double to a triple.

1992 Sugarloaf lift becomes a triple. A Yan Kaczynski designed cross-transfer tow is installed at the base area between Wildcat and Albion.

1992 Conveyor system added to Supreme Lift to assist skiers in loading the fixed-triple lift.

1992 Sugarloaf lift becomes a triple. A Yan Kaczynski designed cross-transfer tow is installed at the base area between Wildcat and Albion.

1994 A new two-story office building is constructed. The Alpenglou Restaurant is rebuilt and renamed Alf's.

1995 Alta Community Enrichment (ACE) is started by area residents.

1997 Former Alta Ski Lifts General Manager Chk. Morton dies on the 24th of July. Alf Engen dies on the 20th of July.

1999 Sunnyside lift upgraded from a double to a detachable triple. Alta's first detachable lift, Albion bottom terminal moved.

2001 Alta begins grooming the Nordic Track around the base area and in Albion Basin for cross-country skiers.

2002 AltaSnowbird link is established in Mineral Basin. Supreme lift is upgraded from a double to a triple. Sugarloaf lift is upgraded to a detachable quad.

2002 Alta begins taking skiers up Grizzly Gulch for Snowcat Skiing adventures.

2005 The new Watson Shelter is completed. The Germania and Collins chairs are replaced by the new Collins high speed detachable quad.

2007 Alta introduces it's new Axes RFID ticket system with gates.

2008 Conveyor system added to Supreme Lift to assist skiers in loading the fixed-triple lift.

2010 Bars added to Sunnyside Lift. 2011 Bars added to Collins, Sugarloaf and Supreme Lifts.

2012 The new Buckhorn Skier Services Building is constructed at the Wildcat Base.

NOW

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 Principal contributors to Alta's Development as a Ski Area
 The "Wild Old Bunch" - Alta's Senior Ski Ambassadors
 Snapshot of Alta's Snow Safety History
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