

## The Alta Experience

Alan Engen

-last name Engen. ENGEN.

Joey Prokop

Let's talk about Alta as a setting. It's a ski area, it's a place that's, like you say, near and dear to your heart. What's kind of your favorite aspect of Alta?

Alan Engen

Well, as I think of Alta, I don't think of it just as a ski area. I think of it as a place of supreme beauty and that beauty is year-round. I think for most people that go to Alta, I think there are almost as many people that go up there in the summertime as go there in the wintertime, because it is such a beautiful place, with the wildflowers in the summer and the lake up at Secret Lake. And I think that, you know, if you were to pick a spot, if you were to pick a spot in the world that has the beauty, has the skiing ambiance, and has the low-key atmosphere that so many people love at Alta, I think that's what draws people to Alta. And I have to honestly say, too, that I think that the people, the people themselves that live at Alta and work at Alta also bring a special feel to Alta, because you don't get a lot of high pressure. And I think that the people who come there, come there for that reason. It's low-key, and if they love to ski, it's a wonderful place to be.

Joey Prokop

And with that, you know, different resorts, even in Park City, Colorado, whatever, resorts are a destination. You can get a massage and go shopping, you can do all this stuff. How does Alta contrast with that kind of mentality?

Alan Engen

Well, you know, everything has its place, and there is a tremendous market out there for bigness of areas. And people go there for many different reasons. But I think people come to Alta because it's a little more low-key. I kind of think of Alta as an oasis in the winter sports area of bigness. You have a small area that you can come to, you don't even have too many telephones, I think if you go into some of the lodges, you won't find a telephone in the rooms, you know. And so people come to maybe to get away a little bit, and to have a little low-key experience, and have the opportunity to get out and ski some of the most beautiful and challenging terrain that you'll find any place in the world. And I say that, any place in the world. I think it measures up to that kind of a quality standard.

Joey Prokop

That is the, you know, it caters to the locals, it caters to the families. You get the concept of "Ski Free After Three." Who came up with that?

Alan Engen

Well, I'm not sure who actually came up with the idea, but it has worked well. And you know, I think that it's a great idea because it may afford people that may not want to take

the time or the effort because of various reasons, because of demands on their life, to go skiing. But this gives them an opportunity at the end of the day to make a quick run up there and to get on skis. And that's what we want. We want people to try out the sport and to enjoy it. And once they try it out, my gosh, I bet you most of them will get hooked on it and come back time and time again.

Joey Prokop

And that's, I guess that is a theme that has carried through, starting with the Deseret News Ski School.

Alan Engen

Well, my father, of course, he started the Alf Engen Ski School in, after coaching the 1948 Olympic Team, came to Alta. And at the very beginning, it was just my father and my mother - they were the ski school. And Dad kind of scratched his head and said, you know, if we're going to do very much, we've got to start getting a little interest in people skiing. So we had a neighbor that was just down the street by the name of Wilby Durham, and Wilby was the general manager of the Deseret News Ski School at the time. And Dad and Wilby sat down along with my uncle Sverre Engen and the three of them came up with the idea, well, Wilby was looking for increasing circulation, readership of the Deseret News, Dad was looking for a way to increase numbers coming skiing, and they said, aha, why don't we join forces and start the Deseret News Ski School, but we'll make it free for the kids to come out and enjoy the sport. And that's how the Deseret Ski School came on, and that particular program is probably one of the things that was a major catalyst in getting skiing and the growth of skiing in this area.

Joey Prokop

Ski Area - Alta Ski Area - kind of limits the number of lift tickets that they sell during a given day. If it's too crowded, do they stop selling passes?

Alan Engen

Well, you know, it's more controlled by how many people you can get into the area. I don't think that there are, that it's so much that you can't go buy a ticket, but if you can't find a place to park, now that's a real problem. And Little Cottonwood Canyon can only accommodate so much traffic, and so I think there is a bit of a limiting factor there. Also there are other ways to control the number of skiers on the hill. One way is to control the speed of the lift itself, you know, and there's a lot that goes on with controlling the density of the hill with just the speed of the lifts.

Joey Prokop

How about the - at one time wasn't there a lottery to get a season pass?

Alan Engen

Oh, I think if you go back far enough, yes, there was a high demand and it did go that way. I don't think there's anything like that today that I'm aware of. But you know, people have loved to get a season pass, and ski at Alta, and over the years, there have been a lot of different changes, and of course this year, we're all automated at Alta, and

so that makes it very, very - much more convenient for the skiers to get a pass and be able to ski up there.

Joey Prokop

It's a perfect ski, bluebird (?) day, big powder day, where are you going to do?

Alan Engen

Well, I think first of all, it depends on the group of skiers that I usually go out and ski with. And I'll pick my spots based on the skiers themselves. If I find a high-level skier, with high energy and can handle themselves on pretty much all terrain, I'll go to the upper slopes, you know, I'll go to Alf's High Wrestler, I'll go to Gunsight, I'll go to Eddie's High Nowhere. I'll go to places that are steep, deep, and have a lot to it. On the other hand, if I have a group of skiers that are kind of more mellow skiers, that are not so interested in the challenge of steep and deep, but more just like the ambiance of skiing, I'll take them in other places, you know. I'll take them up on Supreme. Supreme is a beautiful area. You can go into parts of it that you can get away from the skiers and ski in very nice, gentle terrain, or you can ski on the other side of the mountain that's groomed, and you can get down and do some wonderful skiing there. So I think, I take a look at the day, I take a look at the skiers that I'm with, and I try and pace it in such a way that the people will come away saying, wow, that was a wonderful experience.

Joey Prokop

Talk about your childhood. You have the fortunate circumstance of basically growing up at Alta. What was that like?

Alan Engen

Well, yes, I can honestly say I probably am one of those that grew up at Alta. Alta's been my ski area from my childhood. We, before moving to Alta, we were in Sun Valley, Idaho, so I was introduced to skiing as a ski jumper. Dad had me jumping on the small jumping hill in Sun Valley before we came to Utah. But in terms of Alpine Skiing, I got my first start skiing at Alta, in front of the Alta Lodge. That's where I made my first turns. And growing up at Alta was a lot different than it is today. First of all, there weren't near as many skiers, you know, that came to Alta. The conditions at Alta were a lot more different. I mean, getting in to Alta and getting out of Alta was a challenge. And there were many occasions where once you got in, you may be there for awhile because avalanches would come down and I had the occasion of being at Alta and being snowed in for days at a time. I can even remember one time when a DC-3 had to fly over Alta and drop food in to us because that was the only way we could get provisions. So things have changed over the years and my early experiences of skiing can, you know, as I think about it, is having the opportunity of being with some of the legends of skiing. You know, of course, my family, my father, of course is probably the one that I have looked to as being my icon in skiing, and having the opportunity to ski with him. But there are others, such as Dad's first assistant director, Junior Bounous. I used to tag Junior all over the mountain, so, you know, I skied with many, many fine skiers, able to grow up, I've been able to ski Alta when you could ski a week and probably not cross the same tracks twice because there were just not that many people that were out - (tape break)

Joey Prokop

In the early days, who came up with the techniques on how to ski that deep powder snow?

Alan Engen

Well, as I look at Alta, you know, and I'll kind of confine my comments to the Alta area, you certainly can't take away the influence that Dick Durrance had. Dick was one of the early Ski School directors in the early '40's that came into Alta, and he pioneered a lot of the early development of some of the early techniques in deep powder. Secondly, I'd have to say my uncle, Sverre Engen, was another one of the pioneers. And Sverre and Dick used to go out and ski together, and they - you've maybe heard the term dipsy doodle and the double dipsy, okay? Well, those are two of the pioneers that came up with that. And then right along behind that, when my dad came in from being a ski jumper, he didn't know how to turn all that well, so my uncle took him out and showed him how to make turns, and got him introduced to the powder. And my father went on to become one of the great all-time powder skiers and even was coined as coming up with the techniques as being the father of the powder skiing technique.

Joey Prokop

With that, can you - we've seen movies of your dad skiing, pretty skier, just like he's having the time of his life, every run. Kind of describe his style.

Alan Engen

Well, Dad was not just a pretty skier, he was a powerful skier. Dad was a real power. He was as strong a man as I've probably ever known in my life. He just was able to do anything, athletically, and so when you see him in the deep snow, what - the thing that has stood out in my mind, is the power that he had. You could see him coming under the snow where you didn't see anything, and then all of a sudden you see this explosive man coming out of the powder and making these beautiful giant turns. And I think that's probably one of the things that set him aside as being such a beautiful skier.

Joey Prokop

I guess also, lets talk about the development of the ski industry in Utah, and how his professional ski jumping career morphed into maybe his teaching career, or maybe his, I don't know, his personality career, at Alta.

Alan Engen

Well, you have to remember that back in the early 1930s there wasn't much in the way of Alpine skiing, per se. There were people that skied around the mountains, and toured around the backcountry with the Wasatch Mountain Club, but in terms of masses of people skiing, there wasn't a whole lot of that going on. But there was ski jumping. Okay? And people would come up and watch these daredevils fly through the air and Ecker Hill was one - put Utah on the map. And people should realized that that's what really caught attention of Utah as a ski Mecca, and the fact that my father was making world record jumps on this place called Ecker Hill. Well, that kind of died out in the

middle to late 1930s. People, instead of going to watch ski jumpers, they wanted to go out and try the sport themselves. This looks pretty cool. So they started going out in the area and the Forest Service didn't want people just out floundering around with the avalanche danger and everything else out there, so they retained my father to go out and look at potential sites along the Wasatch Range, and into Idaho and other places. Overall Dad laid out about 31 ski areas. But Alta was one of the first. And Alta came in from the Brighton side, over Catherine's Pass, and came down into the Alta Basin in about 1935 and stayed with a couple of miners, lingering miners, that were still mining up there, the Jacobsen brothers. Stayed there for about three days, looked over the area, skied back down Little Cottonwood Canyon, and then came back the next summer to look at it in the summertime, and overall he made the recommendation to the Forest Service that Alta would be a wonderful area. Alta was a known commodity. It was a mining town before that, so they knew it had plenty of snow. But they wanted to get Dad's opinion as to whether it was a place that they could make into a potential ski area. And Dad said, you bet, on one condition: you better get some people in there to start planting some trees, because during the mining that was up there in the 1800s, why, the miners had denuded a lot of the hillsides to shore up the mine tunnels. And they had taken all of this timber out, so it just left an open area there, which would make it very vulnerable to avalanches. So the CCCs came in, in the late 1930s, early 1940s, and there was a major effort done in Alta to plant a lot of the trees. And the people that come up and enjoy Alta today, and they see these hillsides with these beautiful trees all over, a lot of that was due to the CCCs - the Civilian Conservation Corps, that had come up there and planted all these trees in the early 1940s.

Joey Prokop

Did the CCC also build the rock shelter that is now the Snowpine Lodge?

Alan Engen

There was a - (tape break)

Joey Prokop

With your dad's experience as a ski jumper, kind of explain how he got involved with Joe Quinney, who went on, with others, to form the Salt Lake Winter Sports Association.

Alan Engen

Well, yes, the Salt Lake Winter Sports Association was really the group that raised the money to start building the first lift - the Collins lift - to go into Alta. And the key person in that was a lawyer, very prominent lawyer in Salt Lake by the name of S. Joe Quinney. And Joe had also before the big Alta push had had a very heavy influence as one of the leaders of the Salt Lake Ski Club, which was the organization that sponsored many of the jumps, jumping events that were held on Ecker Hill. As a matter of fact, his son David Quinney became a very prominent amateur jumper on that hill in the early days. So the tie between Joe Quinney and Alf Engen started well before the years that Alta was really started as the beginning of a ski area. But when Joe got involved, well, Joe had already talked to the Forest Service and acquired all of the land upon which the Salt Lake Winter Sports Association could lease from the Forest Service, so that all of this could come

together. Dad and Joe Quinney were kind of hand in glove from the very, very outset. And that's one of the reasons why we now have the Joe Quinney Winter Sports Center and the Alf Engen Ski Museum hooked at the waist on the Park City side.

Joey Prokop

And then I guess an important fact that the Forest Service had this land to put a ski area on - how did they get that?

Alan Engen

Well, you probably have to give a lot of the credit to a man by the name of George H. Watson. George Watson came to Alta at the early 1900s, and it was in kind of the second wave of the mining era at Alta, and he worked his way up and stayed on at Alta. And as mining petered out as an occupation and miners left, why, they left their claims and Watson picked them all up. He gathered them all up, as many as he could, and he ended up with about 85 claims that he had under his ownership. Well, ownership has a price to pay for that. And the price is you have to pay taxes on all of that land, and George Watson got himself into some tax difficulty, and the way to eliminate that was to donate the surface rights to all the land, all the claims that he had, to the Forest Service, back to the Forest Service. The Forest Service needed more land, in order to develop this area called Alta as a ski area. So he donated the land, a lot about 700 acres or so, plus the land that the Forest Service already had around Alta, which gave them a total of about 1800 acres, and with that - (tape break)

Joey Prokop

That's kind of the impetus for this documentary - to celebrate Alta's 70th year in operation. Why don't we talk a little bit about what it took to get that Collins Lift together and the operation or the spotty operation thereof, because - Explain to us how that Collins Lift kind of was put together.

Alan Engen

Well, you have to realize that back in the late 1930s, the concept of uphill conveyance using a chair lift was a brand new thing. I mean, there weren't that many places that you could point to that says, that's what we want to have, is a chair lift. They did have three lifts that had been built in Sun Valley, Idaho, and they had experimented with having a chair lift built back east, but outside of that, here in Utah, there was no such animal. They had rope tows that were operational, but nothing where you could sit in a chair and have it taken up. So building a chair lift was a brand new experience. And to do that you had to have chairs, yes, but you also had to have, you had to put up the terminals. And in those days, the things they had to rely on were timbers. Well, where are you going to get the timbers? Well, they had to pull them out of the mineshafts; they had to take it out of the old tramline that went down from Michigan City and Alta all the way to Tanner's Flat. They had to pull timber there in order to use those, and that's what the first towers were made from, were these old mining timbers, and they built that and then strung the chairs onto that. Getting to chairs to work was another big feat, because that didn't just magically happen, that they put them up, strung the wires, and all of a sudden, pushed a button and it worked fine. It didn't work fine. They had many trial and errors before they

could finally get it to work. The other thing they had to contend with was deep snow. And if you take a look at some of the early looks at the old Collins Lift, you'll see these trenches that they had to build because the snow was so high that in order to get the skiers through, they had to make it almost like a tunnel that you went through before you could get all the way to the top. And that was a lot of hard work, just digging those things out in those days. So it was a big effort. They started the first lift operation to the public; I think it started in about January of 1939, really, is when they opened it to the public. And they started it for 25 cents a ride, or \$1.50 a day. Well, that's the way it started, and they came in by droves in there to try this new Collins Lift, which I think we can honestly say without any reservations, it's Utah's first chair lift uphill conveyance system. We can honestly say that for sure.

Joey Prokop

Why did they name it the Collins chair - do you know?

Alan Engen

Yeah, there's a guy by the name of John Collins, who was a miner and you've probably heard of Collins Gulch, okay? Collins Face? Well that was the hillside that the lift went up, and that's where the name came from.

Joey Prokop

Now let's talk a little bit more in depth about Mayor Watson. And he did have those mine claims, that - he kind of consolidated those, had to deed that to the Forest Service, for what was it? A dollar? But he maybe could be given credit as having the first vision to put an attraction up Little Cottonwood Canyon.

Alan Engen

Well, George Watson was, one of his talents was, he was a supreme promoter. He was always looking for a way to entice people to come up to what he used to coin as "romantic" Alta. And even before Alta was a ski area, why, he had developed a system of getting sightseers to come up during the summer months, on an old rail contraption car that he called the Jitney (?). And he would load sightseers up on the back of that and drive them up to Alta, and they could spend a day during the summer and look around Alta and stay at his boarding house if they wanted to stay overnight. And then he'd take them back down to the city. Well, when he sold, ultimately when he sold in the 1930s, his rights to Alta, why then the next thing is, lets, there's money to be made here as a winter resort as well. So he self-appointed himself as Mayor, Mayor George Watson. And he became probably Alta's most prominent promoter. He spent the rest of his life, from the early 1940s all the way to his passing in 1952, and he spent most of his time doing nothing more than just promoting Alta. That was his baby, and people loved him. He was a wonderful man, very, very warm. He lived in a cabin, the cabin is no longer at Alta, but to get into it, you had to go down a shaft, to climb down into it, and he would host visitors up there. He had, he would bring visitors into his little cabin that he had down there and he'd fix them what he used to call his ski-ball. And he'd never tell anybody what he put into his ski-ball, because he had a curtain that he'd pull, so that nobody could see what he was putting in those ski-balls. But people seemed to enjoy

them. And getting out of the cabin was a lot tougher than going in, so - And for the kids like me, when I'd go into it, he'd serve a pine ball, and that pine ball was water with a tooth pick in it. And he'd say, now this is what you drink.

Joey Prokop

With that, how has the resort kind of grown and changed? I mean, the original area is the Collins chair, which - what was the original beginning and end to Collins chair, in terms of the resort today?

Alan Engen

Well, if you physically know where the old Watson shelter is, that building is still there, on the hillside. And the terminus of the old Collins lift was just a little bit down the hill from that. You could walk up the hill and get there to the old Watson shelter. So that would give you an idea there. Then they had, back of the Watson shelter, going on up towards Peruvian, they had the Peruvian Lift. And that was a single chair lift, and that burned down by fire, you know, in the 1940s, and was never really rebuilt. So those were the first two lifts. And then they had another little lift, which was the Rustler Lift, which was located pretty much across from where the Rustler Lodge is physically located right now. And that was a small little chair lift, and that was used for a little while over there as well.

Joey Prokop

And then, when did - so the Peruvian Chair, did that kind of run up essentially where, from you know Hamburger Hill up -

Alan Engen

Well, if you know where the - do you know where Aggie's Alley is?

Joey Prokop

Yes.

Alan Engen

Okay. If you were to use that as your base point, and just go straight up, up towards the, up the lift to the point where you're looking back down into the Snowbird area, that's where the lift ran.

Joey Prokop

So kind of between Punchbowl and Warm-up?

Alan Engen

That's right. That would be a good point for that.

Joey Prokop

Then when did a chair get put towards Germania?

Alan Engen

Well, Germania came in in the 1950s. They put that lift in as a, as Alta's first double chair lift. And it has gone through a couple, a number of evolutions over the years as well, but that didn't happen until, oh I'm going to say around 1953, around that time frame, when the Germania lift went in. I'd have to look at the dates, because they're all recorded, but as I recall, the Germania didn't go in until early 1950s.

Joey Prokop

So it used to run kind of up through Fred's Slot?

Alan Engen

Yes, it did, it went right up through Fred's Slot.

Joey Prokop

Who was Fred?

Alan Engen

Fred is Fred Spire (?), okay? Fred Spire was Alta's first general manager. He was the one that came in and helped build the tail end of the original Collins Lift, and was probably the key person that helped get the early beginnings of Alta as a operational ski area started at Alta, played a very, very dominant role in the early days and development of Alta. And succeeding him was Chick Morton, who ran the area after him, after Fred left.

Joey Prokop

Lets talk about Fred Spire and his, I guess, mechanical abilities, to get that Collins Chair to run well.

Alan Engen

Well, I think that you have to back up a little bit and I told you a little bit of the difficulties that they were having, getting the Collins Lift to originally work well. It would operate for a while and then it would shut down, and then they couldn't get it started again. And they had hired, prior to Fred Spire, they had hired Marthinus Strand, who was an electrician and he was the one who got things started. But when Fred came in, he had an engineering background. Fred was an engineer. He knew an awful lot about heavy equipment, and he was the one who actually got the original Collins chair to work. And he was an Austrian, and he was a tough Austrian. And very, very few people had the gumption to go against what Fred said. So he was able to come in and where people may want to drag their feet a little bit, he would get them highly motivated very, very quickly. So he was the ideal person to come in and get things running, and to get the staff built that could take over and operate that lift. And you have to remember, too, that the people that were really starting the area back in those days, in the late 1930s, early 1940s, they had to wear many hats, they weren't just the specialists in one area. They had to be on the mountain, they had to be the snow safety people, they had to be the operators, they had to serve food to the people that came up there. They did many, many things. So Fred was one of the early pioneers that helped really develop Alta and get it going from the very beginning.

Joey Prokop

Lets talk a little bit about, in general terms, the kind of people that kind of got that place going, because as we know, we can go up there and drive our cars up for the day, and have a nice day skiing and then head back home and sleep in our nice warm beds. I guess to make that place go you had to have a real love of being in the outdoors, and kind of love the cold and love the snow and love the, you know, just love the rugged, I guess the rugged character of the area.

Alan Engen

Oh I don't think there's any question about that. You know, the pioneers, the people that really got these areas, and I'm not just speaking about Alta, I'm speaking about any of the ski areas, that you, first of all, you had to have a great love of the outdoors. You wouldn't go through what they had to go through to develop the ski areas around Utah and Colorado and Wyoming, if you didn't have this passion for wanting to be out in the beautiful mountain air and to have a place that could be developed to have people come and enjoy it as well. And it was not easy. It was definitely not easy, particularly in Alta, because Alta's one of those areas that has an abundance of snow and having to contend with not just a little snow, but a lot of snow, and having to try and keep things operational in those days, was a tough job. And they had to be people of tremendous strength, both mentally and physically, in order to do the things that had to be done to allow the area to operate. And you take the Fred Speyers and you take the Chic Mortons and you take the Monty Atwaters, and the Alf Engens, and the Sverre Engens, you have the people that were really up there in the early days. They were all very, very strong individuals. And it took that in order to help make Alta grow.

Joey Prokop

(tape break) - how did the whole concept of snow safety from, you know, instead of waiting for an avalanche to fall on our heads, we kind of got the idea that we're going to go out and trigger these avalanches. How, who came up with that concept?

Alan Engen

Well, you know, you have to go back again to the transition of the ski jumping era into the early days where people were starting to gravitate into the canyons and started skiing. And once Alta became a ski area, once Alta developed to where it was promoting people to come up to Alta, and the road actually to Alta, the physical road to Alta was actually built in 1936. Before that it was just a rail line that went into the canyon. So once the roads were there, they had to have a way to start controlling the snow as best they can, to try and minimize, minimize as best they could, avalanches from occurring, at least at times when it could put the skiing populace into jeopardy. So they started, first of all, with a man by the name of Tangren, and he came up there with the first one to just take limited snow measurements. And it was from Tangren that worked with my uncle, that came in to Alta in those days, and they together started developing some techniques to really fine tune and technologically take measurements of what needed to be taken. The Forest Service liked their work so much that they kept my uncle on and designated him as America's first officially designated snow ranger. And that's what my uncle did for a

number of years at Alta, in the early 1940s up until around 1945. He and my aunt, Lois Engen, they stayed up there and they did a lot of the early pioneering of a lot of the early techniques that were used in taking snow measurements, and actually going off and setting charges, and doing the things that needed to be done to help develop the snow safety techniques. Monty Atwater came in and, based on the work my uncle did, Sverre Engen, and he was the one who really took the next step, because he started bringing in high level explosives, developed the avalauncher, which by the way is still used, technology-wise today at Alta, some of the work that Monty did. And Ed LaChappelle came in after Monty and in turn, he was the one that pioneered a lot of the actual physics that went behind a lot of the technology that is used. Ed LaChappelle, Dr, Ed LaChappelle, has developed many, many wonderful things that are still in use today.

Joey Prokop

I guess, wasn't he the first one to figure out or started taking in not just the rate of snowfall but the effects of wind and temperature?

Alan Engen

Absolutely. Layers of snow, the whole nine yards, there are many, many pictures of Ed working out in there. And he developed a lot of the technology that is used today. LaChappelle is a true legend in snow safety.

Joey Prokop

With that, lets talk a little bit about some of the various types of artillery that have been employed throughout the years. I use the term artillery loosely, you know, to include everything, I guess, anything that blows up, how it's delivered.

Alan Engen

Well, the early ways it was done was with dynamite, or they'd bring in a Pack Howitzer, and that was usually done with the support of the National Guard, that they'd bring up into Little Cottonwood Canyon, and they'd shoot it with a 75 millimeter Pack Howitzer. And then they developed a little bit later up to using 105s. I don't believe that would be allowed to be done anymore, because you know, there's too much growth in all of the canyons behind Alta and everything, than to use artillery like that. So that's why you go to the avalauncher and other technical advances that have come on since that time. But in the early days, yeah, there was a lot of shooting that was done, and it was done with these Howitzers. And they'd shoot right from the road in back of the Alta Lodge. And they had it pointed towards Superior, or they had it pointed towards now called Alf's High Rustler, and various other points where they could shoot down the avalanches. And that was the early technology that was used, in order to man-made, bring down avalanches so that they wouldn't come down on their own in a time where it wouldn't be, put people in jeopardy.

Joey Prokop

With that, too, what about the use of hand charges? Is this more of a questions for -

Alan Engen

Well, you know, the whole development of the hand work, there's been a tremendous number of advances that have been made over the years, of how it's done and the controls of that. And I think that you know, really to get the most definitive answer, you'd need to go to the experts that really do that, day in and day out, and they could give you a better picture of that history.

Joey Prokop

Okay. Lets talk a little bit about your family history, and your dad and your uncles; they were born in Norway and then immigrated?

Alan Engen

Well, Dad, my father and my two uncles, Sverre and Corey Engen, as well as my grandmother immigrated to the United States in the late 1920s and early 1930s. My grandfather died when my father was a very young boy, and my father was the youngest of the three, or the oldest of the three brothers. And my grandfather died at the age of 31 years old, of the Spanish Flu. He had never had a sick day in his life, but he got - if you remember there was that worldwide epidemic back in the 1920s that wiped out a lot of the world's population, and Norway was hit with that. And my grandfather was part of that. So Dad basically, in order to keep the family unit together, why, he needed to find ways to make money, because it was hard in Norway in those days. So he was the first to come, and he came over to the United States at the age of 19, and started work, not knowing the language. He started in the Chicago area. One thing led to another, through a whole different story, but he got affiliated with the professional ski jumping group. And since Dad was already a known champion jumper in Norway, why, he soon established himself as a powerhouse ski jumper here in the United States. And that group, the professional ski jumpers, made Utah one of the stops on their ski jumping tour. So Dad came here to Utah in the late 1920s, and loved this place so much. He said, this is where I want to stay. So he pretty much left the professional end of the ski jumping tour group, and represented Utah, primarily, here at a lot of the professional events. And when ski jumping died down, after making a number of world jumps, why, he decided that at that point, he needed to move into a little different area of skiing, and that was also during the war years, and so he became one of the, during World War II, he was a special expert on winter warfare. So one thing led to another, and then after the war, why, he became coach of the Olympic team for the United States and we lived in Sun Valley, Idaho, and then came here to Utah after that.

Joey Prokop

With that, who were some of the other people who helped train the 503 paratroopers group that was stationed in -

Alan Engen

The 503rd Parachute Battalion predated the 10th Mountain Division, really, and that was in the early - about 1942, 1943. And that was at the time that Dick Durrance was the ski school director at Alta. And so they, the 503rd Parachute Battalion was really an experimental unit. They wanted to try and see if they could take this group of paratroopers from the South, bring them to Utah, which they'd never, most of them had

never even seen snow before, put them on skis, and see if they could turn them into what we call ski-paratroops. And Dick Durrance was the one, he and his cadre, were the ones at Alta, which were charged with bringing these groups of individuals to Alta and teaching them how to ski. And there's been movies that have been made of that transition. Some of them actually migrated into the development of the 10th Mountain Division in Colorado soon after that time.

Joey Prokop

Dick Durrance is a pretty interesting character. He went to college in -

Alan Engen

Dartmouth, yes.

Joey Prokop

Ski racer at Dartmouth. And there didn't he meet a friend named James Laughlin?

Alan Engen

Yes, Dick Durrance was not just a good skier, he was a champion skier. He was probably one of the - you know, you have the Alf Engen, on the Nordic side, and you have Dick Durrance on the Alpine side, okay? And Dick was a powerhouse, wonderful champion, represented this country in Olympic competition a number of times, and of course, in doing so, he skied a lot of his time in Europe. And James Laughlin was one of those that loved Europe, and they made a hook-up over there initially, and when Dick took over the ski school at Alta, they were looking for ways to raise money so that the Alta Lodge could be built. And so Dick, through his early contacts with James Laughlin, invited James to come to Alta and to look it over. And Laughlin liked it so much, he ended up putting a lot of the money into the building of the lodge, and ended up becoming one of the principal owners of what we now call Alta Ski Area.

Joey Prokop

With that, did you know Jay Laughlin very well?

Alan Engen

I know Jay fairly well, but it was through my father. My father and Jay Laughlin were very, very close friends. I do know that Jay was an exceptional writer; he was a very, very high intellect. He loved the mountains. He loved the beauty of Alta, and he did a lot of things in terms of helping to grow Alta. I don't think many people know that some of the early development of huts and the promotion of huts was done by the promotion of Jay Laughlin himself. The huts system, we did have a series of huts up in the Alta area that went over into the Brighton side. And Jay Laughlin played a key role in that. He also, in the early days of Alta, we had a number of major ski races, one of which was the Alta Cup. And the Alta Cup was funded by Jay Laughlin.

Joey Prokop

With that, talking a little bit about - are you familiar with the New Direction Publishing Company?

Alan Engen

Well, again, I know that that was Jay's, you know, that was Jay's publishing company, and he had a, he did a lot of writing. And a lot of the early poetry, poetry was a big thing with Jay, and he did a lot of writing, under the publishing company, New Directions.

Joey Prokop

I think, I just I really find him fascinating. Reading his, even his biography's not like a regular biography - and then we did this, and then we did this, you know -

Joey Prokop

It's just basically the friends he associated with, and some letters he published. He's a fascinating character. Talking about the hut system, there's still, I know, over by the top of Supreme, there's one back by in the woods there. Where were some of those other huts?

Alan Engen

That's true.

Alan Engen

Well, the one that's at Supreme is the only one, it's a Quonset hut type of format, and that's - you can just see the remnants of it right now. You can't really go in and stay there overnight. But there was another hut that was right between Sugarloaf and Mount Baldy, that pass that you go to, you know, where the Baldy Express comes up to the top of, right there? Well, right on that pass, there was another Quonset hut that was located right there. Then they had a couple that went down into the Brighton side, on the other side, so that if skiers were interested, they could hike up. And this was the days before the Germania lift was put in, so you'd have to get off at the top of Collins, and you'd have to hike up and stay overnight at one, and then you'd work over to the one at the top of Supreme, and then you'd go down into the Brighton side and stay. And there was a series of about four of them, I think, total, that you could stay in over a several day period. And once the lifts got in, why, of course, there wasn't near the interest in staying overnight. But I, personally, that was one of my fond experiences as a kid, was going on these overnight hikes, was hiking up and staying in these little huts. This was a fun experience.

Joey Prokop

How about just talking about - what do you think the magic of Alta is?

Alan Engen

Well, you know I think you have to look at ambiance, and when I define ambiance I look at it in a broad context, that it's more than just skiing. It's having a place to go where you have the beauty, some of the most beautiful, picturesque part of the United States is located in this little place called Alta. I've said many times, you can turn 360 degrees and you can have a picture postcard any way you point the camera. So as I look at it, we have a Mecca that is, yes, has some of the greatest terrain to ski on, from very gentle all the way to very, very challenging slopes. You have the beauty and you have the snow

conditions that are great. Then you put on top of that, very, very fine people that believe Alta should be kept pure, not big, but pure, and a little bit more on the low-key side. And I think you put the combination of all of that together, and it makes kind of a, what I call as an oasis. An oasis in winter sports, which is big now. I mean you - and it has its place, and I don't take anything away from bigness. But it's nice to have small places too. And I think Alta falls into that kind of a definition.

Joey Prokop

Drawing on that, you know, you see those movies of your dad and you know others skiing, and the fun that they've had, how does that translate to the fun, I mean, it's just, I mean that's what I love about it. When I go up there, I'm not thinking about, you know, the mortgage payment, I'm not thinking about, you know, whether my laundry got done, you know, whether I've taken care of this. I am out there, I'm on those skis, and I am doing this. This is what I'm doing. And to be honest, you know, I ski in a very life-threatening manner, and so, you have to pay attention to what's going on. How about the escape?

Alan Engen

Well, I think a lot of people do come to Alta for that reason. You know, they do it as a way to maybe get away a little bit, to where you don't have the influence of high technology. Not that you don't see skiers out there with their telephones, but a lot of people come to just plain get away a little bit. To put their mind on something else. And skiing is a way to do it. Alta is a wonderful - Alta is a place that has the beauty, with skiing that offers a wonderful sport to get out and enjoy the outdoors, and in conditions that are just magnificent. And I think people do come to Alta for that reason. They come there to get away from the busy hustle of everyday life, and to just think about other things a little bit, besides the busy aspect of life.

Joey Prokop

Do you know who coined the term "Alta is for skiers"?

Alan Engen

You know, I don't know who physically or came up with the idea of "Alta is for skiers." But I know it's been around for a long time. And even if I did know, I don't know that I'd want to put it out because as soon as you do that, somebody's going to say, well, I knew that before that time, you know? But it has been around. I can say that it isn't something that just came up recently. It's been around for years. And I think probably it became more to the forefront of the public eye when snowboarding came around, okay, and came into being. And there was a management decision that was made that we're going to stay with what we know best, and that's catering to the skiing and to the business. And so skiing for skiers became, you know, one of the key phrases that was used there. But it was around long before that time. It was around back in the 1950s, I know, because we used it a great deal at that time as well.

Joey Prokop

Lets talk about some of the big ski races that were hosted at Alta over the years.

Alan Engen

Well, you know, in some ways, people don't realize that Alta was a racing Mecca at one time. We don't put on too many international races anymore, but back in the 1940s, and into the 1950s, and even into the 1960s, there were national championships that were held at Alta. We had a, in 1952 we had the national giant slalom. I think Susie Harris Ridding was one of the winners of that particular one that was held at Alta. In 1960, we had the downhill slalom and giant slalom championships that were held at Alta. And in addition to that, why, as a qualifier for the Olympic qualifying races, they used to have the Snow Cup, the Alta Snow Cup that was held every year. And that was one of the most challenging races on the series of about five races that were held every year. People think that the Snow Cup was because of the amount of snow, but it really wasn't. The guy's name that it was named after was named Snow. But at any rate, that was a big race. The Alta Cup that I mentioned, that Jay Laughlin sponsored, was also a fairly big race, back in those days. So Alta did hold and conduct a number of the early races. In addition to that, besides racing, not too many people can remember the days that we had jumping competitions that were held at Alta. We had the Landes Memorial Ski Jump, and when Ecker Hill died down, why, the Landes Jump at Alta was the one that picked up most of the high-level jumping competitions that were held. And that was, you know, from the late 1940s all the way through the 70s that we held a number of events there.

Joey Prokop

Where is - Landes Hill, isn't that over kind of below Eagle's Nest?

Alan Engen

Yes it is. And if you go almost across, directly across the hill from the Snowpine Lodge, you can still see the takeoff, at least during the summer months, you can still see the takeoff of the old Landes Hill. It's still located there.

Joey Prokop

Lets talk about some of the big gelande jumps that were held there. A lot of gelande contests and maybe first explain gelande and then talk about some of them.

Alan Engen

Well, when you think of gelande, people think of that as a sport, but going off rocks was a gelandesprung, you know, back in the early days. And so gelande was going on at Alta for many, many years. As a competitive sport, it probably had its beginnings in the early 1960s, and I think again, my father played an instrumental role at least at Alta in bringing one of the first gelande tournaments into being, and it was held at the base of High Rustler. There was a mine dump, which isn't there anymore, but there was a mine dump right there. And we put on the first tournament in April 1963, and I ended up that myself, so I probably am the first gelande winner at Alta. And then the gelande was moved over to a mine dump coming out of the Corkscrew area, and ending right down at the base of the Collins Lift. And for many years after that, during the 60s, early 70s, why, events were held every year, usually in the spring, around March-April timeframe, and it would draw skiers from all over the place to come and jump. We even had the Wide World of

Sports one year that televised the gelande. And the difference there is it was a highly interesting and entertaining, because the way the jumps were built, it would propel the jumpers high into the air - 30, 40, 50 feet in the air, as opposed to following the contour of the hill as you would in Nordic ski jumping. So it offered a lot of spills, and a lot of the development of the inverted aerals that we see in Olympic competition today were taken from some of the early jumpers that would come to Alta and do flips off that jump in the gelande competitions.

Joey Prokop

Didn't it take awhile before inverted maneuvers were actually allowed in FIS competitions?

Alan Engen

It was, it took awhile before it was allowed, but some of the inverted maneuvers were, like I say, were developed right on that mine dump at Alta, back in the 1960s.

Joey Prokop

To this day you can see Sam Howard's kids [?] their little kickers down

Alan Engen

Yes you sure can. Absolutely.

Alan Engen

Let's talk a little bit about the mining days, because a lot of what makes Alta special is that it isn't known just for being a ski Mecca. It was known for being one of the prominent mining towns in America at one time, and you have to almost go back to the very beginnings, back in the days when the pioneers entered the valley in 1847, around that time. But you know it didn't take very long before there were permits that were given to go into Little Cottonwood Canyon, but not for the idea of mining, it was for the idea of getting timber, and bringing timber out. So you had some sawmills going up Little Cottonwood Canyon, and then around 1864, around that timeframe, then comes the influence of mining. Silver-bearing ore was found at the top of Little Cottonwood Canyon, not far from where the current Peruvian Lodge is located. And within a very short period of time, claims started to be filed up in that area, and mining started to become a major part of the town. By the early 19, or the 1870s, okay, there was a town starting to be built. They used to put the word city behind everything, even though it wasn't near what we know as a city. The first one they built was Central City, and then it was expanded into Alta City, which was moved just a little bit further up the hillside to the east. And in its heyday, it had several thousand people that called Alta City home. It had a couple of boarding houses, it had a school, there were people living up here, and kids that were up here at that time. 26 saloons, had three breweries, and it even had a brothel. And you know, we know now that in the location where we have our maintenance shop, which has the term Cat Shop, which takes care of our Sno-Cats, that has a double meaning, because that was the physical location of the brothel back in the 1800s. So it did have people that lived up here year-round, and performed mining as their primary function. And if you stop to think about it, that had to be pretty rough. It

was a rough town. It was not a place for going up and just enjoying yourself like we do today. There were a number of fights that went on, there's even a graveyard that's still physically up at Alta that has people that had to be buried that died in violent activities that were up there in those days. So it was not an easy place to live. But there was skiing that was going on. In those days, the miners during the wintertime, when they weren't actually back in the mines, they skied, but they called their skis flip-flops. That was the term they endeared for the skis that they used in those days. So some of the early skiers, some of the early skiing, that was started, that we know was skiing, was started by miners that came here. And mining per se had the influence of coming in under the, Colonel Patrick Conner, which came in here to kind of keep an eye on the Mormon settlers that were here. And a lot of the people that came in as a part of his contingent were miners that came out of the California gold fields. And so they came up and they were the early miners that started in Alta, and go things started. So that's a little bit of the influence of Alta. Alta as a mining town was wiped out by a fire at one time. It also had damage done by an avalanche that kind of hit Alta in the 1880s. And so it has gone through a number of iterations to where it gradually dwindled down and the mining petered out at Alta. But it had a rich history. Now taking it into the present. You know, why do people want to Alta, why do they want to come here? Well, obviously we know that it has snow; we know that it has some of the finest skiing in the world, but the thing that I like about Alta is it has such a rich history. You'd be hard-pressed, in my opinion, to go anyplace in the United States and find another area that has as rich a history in terms of mining that has gone on here, that has built into a world-class ski area as Alta, and I think people that come to Alta, come here to learn a little bit about that history. We have the Alta Historical Society that provides a very valuable service in helping people to understand a little bit of the history that has gone on here, that transcends anything that they can see going on in the hillside today. Alta is a special place. And I think for those of us who enjoy it, I think our big interest is keeping it special and the way it is today as long as we possibly can.

Joey Prokop

That's nice. Let's talk a little bit about some of the physical ski runs at Alta. Now there's some names up there, there's Bounous, there's perlas, well, perlas isn't much of a ski run unless you're crazy, but anyway, Eddie's High Nowhere, Alf's High Rustler. Lets talk about how some of those, the people behind those names.

Alan Engen

Yeah, there are names behind it - Bounous' rock, that you hear, Junior Bounous, played a very important role as one of the early ski teachers at Alta, was my father's first assistant at Alta before he went on to take over ski schools all over the country, and is now very, very famous and a world-class skier located at Snowbird. Eddie's High Nowhere, Eddie Morris, another Alta personality that has skied at Alta for many, many years, was another one of the top instructors. That's where that comes from. McConkey's Rock, that's named after Jim McConkey, another prominent skier, again, part of the Alf Engen Ski School for many years. His son Shane McConkey is on the circuit, worldwide, today. But Jim, in his own write, was a very, very famous and well-known skier. So you have that. Alf's High Rustler, of course, was an honorarium that was given to my father prior

to his leaving Alta as the ski school director, and becoming the director of skiing up there. That was part of the honorarium that was given to him. So there are a number of runs that carry people's names associated to it. But there's a lot of names that are out there that I can't even give the origins of where they came from. They were coined a term, and it stuck, you know, that's probably pretty well the way that is. Collins Face, we've talked about that a little bit before, that was one of the miners that was up here, John Collins. And that's where that name comes from.

Joey Prokop

Have you ever heard the term, an Alta Day?

Alan Engen

Well, an Alta Day to me is any day that you're up there. You know, you can make it an Alta day in a terrible, terrible storm, you know. People will go out and say, this is an Alta day. Or it can be a bluebird day, where it's absolutely picturesque, you know, you have the white mountain peaks and you have blue sky and everything else. That is also a mountain day. So I think that an Alta day is what you want to make out of it. That's the way I look at it. It is a day that you can go, and you can leave the day with a big smile on your face saying, I had a great day today.

Joey Prokop

Nice. How about, do you know any of the big fortunes that were struck during the mining boom - the Walker Brothers?

Alan Engen

You know, I don't know any fortunes. I know that there was a lot of mining activity that went on, and I know that during the days that the Emma Mine was being run, which was started by Chisholm and Workmen, but as I was told, in the peak of the mining days, there was somewhere around the neighborhood of about \$5,000 worth of ore a day that was being taken out of the canyon. Now that didn't last forever. There was a limited amount of time that that was being done, but if you put \$5,000 back in the early 1900s, and put that against the value today, you can see that that was big money back in those days.

Joey Prokop

Lets go back and talk a little bit about the ever-present danger of avalanches. And you yourself have lived through being buried in an avalanche. Lets talk a little bit about that memory as a kid.

Alan Engen

Well, yes, I was buried in an avalanche, but it was, I was buried in bed. I was asleep at the time, and I was about 12 or 13 years old. And I was in the Alta Lodge, and it happened about 3 o'clock in the morning. And I was in the Alta Lodge, and both Flagstaff and Cardiff ran, and it was a heavy slide, it was a spring slide. It happened in the March timeframe, and you could hear, I could remember the roar of the avalanche coming long before it hit. And it sounded like, every bit like a freight train, I mean, you

could hear it for a long way off. And it split above the ranger station and part of it came down and hit the Alta Lodge, the other part ran down and came very close to hitting the Peruvian Lodge. But it wiped out, it wiped out all the trees in front of the Alta Lodge, and I was the only one that was actually buried all the way to the ceiling. And I can honestly say that if it wasn't for my father, I wouldn't be here today, because he was the one that was able to dig himself out because it hit part of the room, and in the process of getting to me and digging me out, why he was injured with glass, because the glass had, from blowing out the window, had come across, and he had cut himself up pretty bad. But both my mother and dad were able to dig themselves out and I was the one that was filled to the ceiling. And it did happen, and it was a big avalanche, and it was one that went all along the ridgeline in back of the Alta Lodge, and there was some concern at one time that the whole bunkhouse that held all of the staff that operated the lifts had been hit as well. But as it turned out, it was just the part of the Alta Lodge that buried me. One of the funny things is, one of the funny stories that comes out of this, came after the avalanche, because we were snowed in for a few days, trying to get ourselves down the canyon before they could even get to us, because the canyon had run in a number of places. So it took several days for me to get back so I could get back to school. And I went back in and I had this note from my mother that says, please excuse Alan from school because he was buried in an avalanche. And one of my teachers looked at me and he says, well, Alan, he says, I have to admit that this is pretty unusual. This is not one that I've ever seen before. And just on the basis that it may have happened, I'll give you a pass today.

Joey Prokop

That's funny. I guess that's kind of one of the neat things that I find fascinating, is that you did get to spend your childhood years, a portion of it, at Alta. You know, you were on the cover of Boy's Life magazine skiing deep powder. Where was that shot taken?

Alan Engen

That shot was taken in Punchbowl, and you know, it was a good powder day, and that shot ended up being in a number of places, one of which ended up being on the cover of Boy's Life.

Joey Prokop

Who took that picture? Do you know?

Alan Engen

Yes, I do, and you have to let me think here just a minute because he's a very, very famous photographer. Let me think about that, and I'll come back to that.

Joey Prokop

Yeah, that's fine. Lets touch back about how the mining and the timber going into the mineshafts to shore them up, set up a little bit of the avalanche problem that occurs in the area.

Alan Engen

Well, any time you take timber out, off from a hillside, you increase its vulnerability, depending upon the degree of slope that you're on. But if you take the timber out, that's what holds the snow in. And so when the miners went in, I think the first thing they were concerned about is, well, we have to get away, we're up here, we're digging holes in the ground, we're trying to get to the ore, we have to have some way to retain the walls. And so they really didn't have much choice than to go out and get all the timber that they can. But little did they know is that when they did that, they put themselves in a whole lot of jeopardy. And that's what my dad could see, from a very early stage, is he says, look, we've got to get some sort of vegetation up here to help hold the hillsides so that they would be less prone, now that doesn't mean that it takes it all away, because it won't, you know, avalanches will run. But if you can get things to help hold the hillsides in, it will certainly make it a lot better, and help the situation so avalanches won't be as free to run. Now you take that and you add to it the tremendous technology and the tremendous resources that we have from our snow safety experts at Alta, and we have some of the world's finest that live at Alta, and when you take a look at the tremendous capability for avalanche, and you see what the few avalanches that we do have and how it's controlled, it's due to the technology and the wonderful professionals that we have up there.

Joey Prokop

One thing I would like to have you, can you describe what a dipsy-doodle looks like?

Alan Engen

Well, yes, I -

Joey Prokop

Not the ski hill.

Alan Engen

Yes, well, one ski after the other as you're coming down, you're lifting one foot and then the other, okay? That's usually your dipsy. And if you look at some of the early skiers, the way they turn, that's what they did, you know, the early powder skiers. You don't see that much anymore, okay, most of them keep the snow, right in the snow. But the dipsy is lifting one foot and then the other. It's kind of a half skate, okay?

Joey Prokop

Okay.

Alan Engen

Going down the hill. A half-skating turn.

Joey Prokop

Oh, I get it. Let's talk about kind of a, just a kind of a trip out to High Traverse. Today the High Traverse is kind of like a, in itself, you know, a run. It's basically, you know, there's all levels of skiers out there, but some people fly out that thing at a rather high rate of speed. Has it always kind of been that way?

Alan Engen

Well, you know, yes, I guess it has always been about that way. We know that it can be very challenging at times, and I think you've been there when you've had big huge bumps that you've had to navigate through in order to get out there. It has never been really easy, and I think that oftentimes some of the skiers that go out there, you know, get into conditions that may be a little bit more than they had bargained for. On the other hand, I think that the goal has been, at Alta, is to try and control traffic and encourage, as much as we possibly can, to have the skiers that go out there to be courteous about it. The worst that can happen is to have skiers that are going slower and having people, you know, going by them lickety-split. That to me, I think, is asking for trouble. I think it's not a good thing to do, and I would be one that would caution people to use a little common sense when you're taking that trip out there.

Joey Prokop

How about the fact that there's one aspect of Alta, that there are a lot of places to get the goods or, you know, even if it's not that good, to get there, you have to hike. You know, kind of explain, I guess, you know, if you want to go to Eddie's from Upper Sunspot, why don't you kind of explain what goes on there

Alan Engen

Well, you know, one of the questions that is asked not just of myself but others, if, well, why don't you put a lift over here? Or why don't you put a lift over here, because we like the area, it'd make it so much easier to get there. We've always taken the position that, the position is that as soon as you put a lift in, that means moguls, okay? That means that the things that people like to ski to get off trail a little bit, is taken away. And so we're very, very cautious and very limited about saying we're going to add lifts to add lifts. Because we want people to have the experience of getting off trail and hiking a little bit for it. Yes, it's work, but that's what makes the experience so enjoyable, is to work for it a little bit, to go a little bit to the high country, to get away from it a little bit, and then to be able to enjoy the experience of skiing in some of the world's best snow conditions.

Joey Prokop

That sums it right up for me.