

THREDBO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WILLIAM ROBERT (BOB) ARNOTT

An Oral History

**conducted by Jerry Krejzar, Tatra Investment
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Bob Arnott 2011

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WILLIAM ROBERT (BOB) ARNOTT

Interviewed by Jerry Krejzar at Happy Jack's, Thredbo, 13th August, 2010

Jerry: Hi Bob, the Thredbo Historical Society has asked me to do your oral history, especially related to your experience in FIS and ski-racing, your association with the Society and the history of Thredbo. Firstly would you give me your full name and where you were born, and your occupation?

Bob: My full name is William Robert Arnott, I am 86, and I was born in Sydney and am retired.

Jerry: What were you doing Bob?

Bob: Many things, in University I did science, Physics, I worked in PMG (Post Master's General) research for a while, SMA (Snowy Mountains Authority) for a while, and when I was overseas I had a job designing computers, simply because I had an interest in applied logic, the way you stick the bits together.

Jerry: Were you associated with the Arnott family, the biscuits people?

Bob: My father was a director and for a short time I was a director up to the age of 70 but then I had to retire because there was an age limit.

Jerry: Did you get any practical hands-on experience in the making of biscuits?

Bob: No, no there were too many others. My great-great grandfather who founded it had seven sons and a number of daughters and I can't remember the names of them all, and my father was the legal director. He was heavily involved and I helped to put in computers.

Jerry: Did you remain in the computer industry?

Bob: Actually from about the age of 50 I found that I could retire so there were a lot of things I wanted to do.

Jerry: Mainly skiing?

Bob: (Laughs)

Jerry: What and when was your first skiing experience?

Bob: In 1935 I went to Kosciuszko with a school party, I was 12 at the time and my parents were rather dubious about me going until they found that Shore was being taken up by one of my father's first cousins, and he said he undertook to keep an eye on me, so I was allowed to go.

Jerry: 1935, what was here in 1935?

Bob: Hotel Kosciuszko, The Chalet was there but I did not go there until I was 16.

Jerry: What do you remember about the Hotel Kosciuszko in those days?

Bob: It was a straightforward old-fashioned hotel, it had a pool, and you could freeze it so you could skate on it and when it was really cold you could skate on the lake.

Jerry: Was it old-world European in style?

Bob: Not really it was fashioned on the hotel at Mt Buffalo, quite similar actually.

Jerry: Who taught you skiing?

Bob: On these little tours there was a series of Australian instructors who taught me.

Jerry: What technique was taught in those days?

Bob: The head of skiing was George Lamble. His father was the head of the Tourist Bureau because the place was run by the Railways.

Jerry: Did they teach The Arlberg Technique?

Bob: It would have come down from Austria. George Lamble it was, he was the son of the boss of the NSW Railways and Department of Tourism. He had been in Europe and was instructed in the Arlberg Technique. I think it was 38 when we had two top people who came out and taught, Ronald Kossman and Friedl Pfeiffer, they were both Austrians.

Jerry: Friedl Pfeiffer! He started Aspen didn't he?

Bob: That was afterwards.

Jerry: He was out here before the War, that is fascinating.

Bob: The Chalet burnt down in 1938.

Jerry: Were you around, were you there?

Bob: One of my cousins was, he was the only injury. He slid down a drain-pipe and cut his hand open.

Jerry: It would have made the headlines, was it completely burnt down?

Bob: Yes completely. The extraordinary thing was that it was burnt down in July/August and the Tourist Bureau rebuilt, that is the present building, rebuilt for the next season, and also they had built the first T-Bar in Australia, at Charlotte Pass, and it was all done by May, when you could use it. I can't see any company or organisation doing that these days.

Jerry: That was 1938 and they were the times you were going to the Hotel Kosciuszko.

Bob: Actually I went up again with Evan Mander-Jones and the Shore party before that.

Jerry: Who was Evan?

Bob: He was a teacher at Shore.

Jerry: So this was school time skiing?

Bob: Yes we had the May holidays where we skied at The Chalet. We picked up our skis and put them over our shoulder and walked up towards the summit one day, through the scrub and stuff we didn't go around the road, on patches of snow we did a little skiing.

Jerry: How come Shore was involved with skiing?

Bob: I think Evan must have sold it to the school, why he was involved I don't know. I would have said that we probably had about a dozen schools that sent school parties up to the snow.

Jerry: When do you think that you became pretty proficient?

Bob: In 1939 I was allowed to go up alone, I was 16 I think. I went straight to The Chalet, I arrived at the Hotel and rented skis, I think you could rent your skis in those days, went up to Smiggin's and the weather was coming in, already quite a heavy winter and we met up with another party there. We had to go into the wind across the Perisher plain and over the Gap.

Jerry: How did they get you there on cross country skis or skins on downhill skis?

Bob: Downhill skis, you would not use skins for that, it was mostly flat, if you went uphill in those days you would take your skis off and do steps. We got to the top of the Gap and the wind was really quite strong, quite strong and there was a little hut there, Bett's Camp.

Jerry: I have heard the name Bett's Camp but I am not quite sure what or where it was.

Bob: It was a fairly large hut actually, probably about 20 people could sleep there and it was rudimentary, but you could cook there. Part of the time they had a cook, sent up from the Hotel, and things were a bit short as when the weather was so bad they could not get the dog team in.

Jerry: You are joking. Is that how they got the food in?

Bob: I am not. I have a picture of one of my friends sitting there with a potato on a fork; we really did not have much. I missed something there. I almost discovered Thredbo a lot earlier. We went down to the Perisher Gap and you turn left and Bett's Creek was running down there and Bett's Camp was across the creek, with a bridge across.

We started going down in the gully and we could see a light at Bett's Camp opposite, we had to go up the stream to get to the bridge, but I am not sure if it was a good idea perhaps we should have tried to get straight across. Anyhow as we were going down towards the creek the snow poles which guide you got shorter and shorter, as the snow got deeper and deeper.

Eventually we got to the creek which led to the bridge but the snow was higher than the snow poles, so we sort of worked out which direction to go and we headed in that direction or so we thought and after about 5 or 6 minutes we got a bit uncomfortable, we looked over behind us over our left shoulder, and there was a tractor that would pull things in sometimes, it was already too dark, and he was coming over the hill, over the Gap, behind us there.

We were heading for the Thredbo river, which was completely in the wrong direction. We turned around rapidly and we followed him in and the tractor stopped and he got out.

Jerry: What was the tractor doing there?

Bob: Presumably he was taking supplies up or something like that, so we followed him in and the tractor stopped. Oh damn! The thing had broken down. The driver got out and disappeared down a hole in the snow, and you could see there was Bett's Camp.

Jerry: In terms of skiing expertise when did you start improving and getting really more into it? Did you go every year?

Bob: I went for every year since 35 but the teaching was pretty rudimentary and we did lots of snow ploughs and we were rather proud when we learnt to do stem turns. Any Christiana's were still a little bit in the future at that stage. I suppose we were beginning to probably do a bit of that but what you could do with your skis was the snow plough to a bit of stem position.

Jerry: When did you actually get into racing?

Bob: We had children's races on Friday's Flat, a race for all the schoolchildren divided into age groups, just up the back of the Hotel. There were quite a lot of competitors about 100 or more kids ran through the course, of various ages.

Jerry: Was there any skiing during the war?

Bob: Until the Japanese came in there was a bit, we still kept going to The Chalet but The Chalet shut down about 1941. From then on George Day was kind of a manager for the whole region.

Jerry: George Day was there for some time?

Bob: George Day ran The Chalet from the start. The Chalet was built in about 1928 and I think that he was the manager from that stage, and this is why his son Billy and Gordon were so good because they were racing and they grew up at The Chalet. They had to go off to boarding school and that kind of thing but they were good skiers.

Jerry: They were competitors of yours?

Bob: I raced against them for a time.

Jerry: Were you in the War?

Bob: I was briefly in the Air Force but then they decided that I would be better off going to University.

Jerry: Then you got back into skiing after the War?

Bob: I managed to get away, there used to be a little hut called the Perisher Hut on the Perisher Gap and 3 or 4 of us went up there one winter, I forget which one, and spent a week or so up there. In those days you did not expect to be "lifted". So on one of those days we went down to Bett's Creek down to the Snowy, climbed up on to the other side to the top of Twynam, skied across to Carruther's and then skied down to the Snowy and on to The Chalet and had our evening meal with the caretaker there, and skied back in the evening after dark, but there was moonlight, back to the hut at Perisher Gap.

Jerry: This was all on downhill skis?

Bob: All on downhill skis, it was later on that I got some cross-country skis. You did quite a lot of touring in those days, but you could not get much fun out of the downhill bits if you only went on cross-country skis. In the early days there was nothing holding your heel down.

Jerry: Do you remember the type of skis?

Bob: They were pretty ordinary skis we did not have any edges. Somewhat later I got a pretty interesting pair of Norwegian skis, which I got second-hand, which had edges, side edges, with the little screws going into the ski and of course they had a tendency to split the ski.

Jerry: When are we talking about serious racing in those days?

Bob: There was some great serious racing that I wasn't involved in as I was a schoolboy. We had Dick Durrance and the Bradley brothers came over in 1937 or something like that, they were the top Americans.

Jerry: Durrance or Durance?

Bob: Durrance, I think he was ranked fifth in the world, and the Bradley brothers were quite highly ranked, but of course there wasn't any official ranking system in those days.

Jerry: I see, so when you talk about a ranking system we are going to get to that, aren't we, or is that a bit later on?

Bob: The rating system really started after the war. There was quite serious racing, Victoria versus NSW before the war, we can find that out easily in the Year Books, but I wasn't involved then of course.

Jerry: So getting to racing when were you actually involved in racing?

Bob: Well directly at the end of the war just upon the Japanese surrender. Spring 1945 we started again, I think the Hotel was opened the year before. It was decided to have a kind of international Services match; there were quite a lot of ships from even Norway, as well as United States, in Sydney Harbour. They all had some skiers on them, well particularly the Norwegians and also the Americans and the Brits so it was decided to have up at The Chalet a big sort of international meeting. Myself and others, we were allowed to put in a university team and The Chalet staffers were allowed to put in a team, and we had quite a 'big do', it was very good fun.

Jerry: In 1945, and so who won?

Bob: I honestly don't remember. I do remember that I ran a reasonable slalom and I always thought of myself as having not much technique so that is when I started becoming a slalom racer rather than a downhiller.

By 1947 there were interstate races and we were getting quite back to normal. In fact I went down to Melbourne in 1947 and I worked there for PMG research. They had all the radio things and everything there and there was quite a lot of actual physical testing that I was involved with, which was all very interesting.

I was very lucky down there that I met shortly after I was there, a mate, a skier who had a pre-war Dodge coupe with which he would go to the snow every weekend in the winter, up to Buller. I went with him in the front seat and all the luggage was in the back except for the room for one extra passenger.

That was the year we used to drive up when there was no snow clearing on the road to Buller, and when there was good snow as there was, I think in 1948, you just drove up until the car would not go any further. Of course you would have to turn around again, and then you would get out and put your skis over your shoulder and walk up the road and side tracks up the hill.

Jerry: No lifts, so you just went to ski.

Bob: Yes, it was worthwhile there was a considerable advantage in climbing your own hills because you would have a much more variety of slopes you could ski. We skied on much more variety of slopes then we do now.

Jerry: Of course it keeps you pretty fit too.

Bob: The first time I saw this place (the eventual site of Thredbo), I started off from the Hotel Kosciusko – no - The Chalet at Charlotte's Pass, over the top here, and just to see what was here. Towards the Golf Course until I hit thick trees and I thought I better get out.

Jerry: You mean when they had already started building here?

Bob: No, this was when the road was still a thought. The Snowy was building the road. There was a fishing track up here.

Jerry: Had Sponar discovered it by then or not?

Bob: Sponar did not discover it I did. (Laughs)

Jerry: (Laughs) That is what I was getting at.

Bob: It depends on the way you look at it. What I was really interested in at that stage, I was interested in what was here, I was primarily interested in. We had two experiences of running downhill over on the Main Range, two experiences of that; we would go over from The Chalet, we will get to that later. Karel Nekvapil took several of us over.

Jerry: We are now looking at 1952 or thereabout?

Bob: We first raced into the Thredbo in 1953.

Jerry: Sasha first started at The Chalet in 1952, didn't she?

Bob: I would have said it was before that, 1951. It would have to be 51 when Karel took us around, I was in The Chalet, to look into the Thredbo valley about 3 or 4 miles further down, there was a big bowl and some ---- we will get to that later.

Racing at that time, you could do slalom's coming down into The Chalet from the Stilwell ridge, you could run a kind of a downhill but that is about all.

Jerry: Are we talking before 1950?

Bob: We were coming out of the War, 1946 was the first time we had an interstate match up at The Chalet, a slalom and we used to have a downhill. The idea was to run it somewhere up from the Townsend ridge right to the Northcote canyon, past the lake there, we thought it would be somewhere at the bottom of Little Austria.

If you get up to Carruther's peak which you can see from Charlotte's Pass, and you can see Townsend up there the Northcote canyon runs down there and just to the left of Carruther's peak, there is a sharp gully like that with a rounded bottom and you can ski it like this.

Jerry: Which you could use for a downhill.

Bob: No you don't use that as the downhill but we thought they were going to come down the main gully. There were about 60 of us who were going to be in this race, we all skied off on our skis and

then carried them up to the pass. The T-Bar was working by then and the choice was whether you walked up Carruther's or up over Clark, and so I was with a stream of people who went up Carruther's and skied down Little Austria down to the bottom to get to the finish which we thought would be there by then, and we climbed up a bit further and we got up to the lake sort of up the top, other people appeared and said that the people setting the course got lost. So we all trooped back to The Chalet and we had a terribly straightforward race a couple of days later off Clark right down to Foreman's hut.

Jerry: These days they would call that back-country skiing!

Bob: Well we had this great advantage there weren't any lifts and you were not tied down to where you had to ski! Well you would get out of the front door of The Chalet and what everybody would want to do was to get out on the Main Range.

Jerry: You must have been trend setters in that respect because in America and here, back-country skiing has become a trend, that is what you were doing back then. Should we cover the years 47, 48, 49 --- those years before people like Sasha and Tony arrived?

Bob: Karel was certainly up there at the end of that season, 1951. He went over and had a look into the Thredbo. He took several of us over from The Chalet.

Jerry: I did not know that Karel was so involved.

Bob: Sasha was always the one you thought was involved, but Karel was there. I think Karel was teaching as well, Sasha was teaching. Anyhow as far as I was concerned, it was a very important day because we came over and looked down into the Thredbo river which I had never seen before. You saw all these slopes going down into the trees, and I thought --- gee this is the obvious place.

Oh, one of the troubles of course with having a race over on Townsend down into the Northcote canyon was that you couldn't rely on the weather and you couldn't race unless the weather was fairly good. You were protected from the north-west and there were longer slopes on the western side, lots of variety, so we said we should have a downhill.

Jerry: That was in the winter of 1951.

Bob: The winter of '51, lateish 1951. A couple of weeks later (I was working for 'The Snowy' at this stage, in Cooma), I skied from there right along this ridge to see what there was all along here. I went as far as Dead Horse Gap and I skied right back and arrived at the Chalet in the evening.

Jerry: A nice, long journey.

Bob: It was quite funny. I started off and considered myself really to be a touring skier, until the racing grabbed me.

Jerry: We are still not talking about touring as with skins? What equipment are we talking about?

Bob: I am not sure about skins, when we really started to use skins. We did not even use skins on Buller in the early days; there were no lifts on Buller. Just about as I was leaving Victoria, John Hilton-Wood put in his first T-Bar, or was it a rope-tow? I can't remember. We certainly had skins for a lot of the journeys, on the other hand it is just as easy to put skis over your shoulder, and kick steps, if the snow is nice, particularly in spring you can kick steps and go up much more directly, than you can on skins.

Jerry: What do you recall about those times with Sasha and Karel once they arrived at The Chalet, were they good times?

Bob: The people who were really interesting were people like Elyne Mitchell and Colin Wyatt, have you heard about Colin Wyatt?

Jerry: No, but I met Elyne through Leo Pockl.

Bob: We went touring with Colin Wyatt, Colin was an Englishman. He had been the English ski jumping champion. He didn't regard himself as having a very good downhill technique except that he was very happy to point his skis downhill and go fast.

Jerry: Sounds like Danny Coleman! Oh Danny was good, Danny could ski. As a trainee I took one of my first cases down from the catwalk with Danny at the front of the akja, and I just 'hung-on' the back as Danny schussed to the bottom! (Laughs)

Bob: I skied quite a bit with Danny; he was a really good skier. The other important thing that happened to me when we were shown the Thredbo valley, was that Christine Davy was with us and she had just come back from skiing in Europe. She was 17 or something at the time. She skied down through the trees. I was selector for the Australian Team at the time and George Chisholm was the other selector; and she just looked so good!

Jerry: In that particular year, you were the selector for the Australian Team? You did not tell me that! When did that start?

Bob: It was probably just after the War, something like that. It was definitely in 1951 because we had this conversation at the time with George Chisholm, a Victorian selector and I was the NSW selector.

Jerry: And Christine Davy had potential?

Bob: She was a new face. Victoria had a lot of medium-good girls but nobody really outstanding and we did not have any particularly good girls at all, but Christine, suddenly, was just so much better; so I said she should be in the team to go to New Zealand, but they said she has not got results! I said, whether she has got results or not, she can beat anybody we have got. When we got to New Zealand she won her first race.

Jerry: Was that about the first 'International' meet or race at the time?

Bob: We had a bit of tradition in a match against New Zealand. I think this was every 2nd year; we must have gone over in 1951. So that was my first introduction to Thredbo and Christine Davy.

Jerry: It is fascinating that this all took place before the gestation of Thredbo.

Bob: The next thing with Thredbo, when I did this trip back and forth, probably looking for a place to set up a downhill, where was the best place, and it turned out to be right where we had started from, down to the river, it was about the highest place.

Jerry: Not Twin Valleys?

Bob: Twin Valleys, yes.

Jerry: There is some rough scrub down there.

Bob: I can tell you a bit about that, but at this stage it did not worry us terribly much because I went over and found a track down, that gave us 1600 vertical feet which was quite a lot in those days and I only had to take 3 trees out for it to be able to be run. From the top of the ridge was 6,800 feet, I think, it was fairly safe from the top.

We came off the top and did a bit of a turn and then there was a ridge you could go out on, and to get on to that ridge I had to cut out 3 trees, and I got permission from 'The Parks'. So I went over and I chopped out these trees and I walked down further and the rest of it went, a rather wide thing, through a steep bit down the other side of it. You dived off into a fairly narrow hole down into the gully and you came out on a V shaped thing where 2 creeks came together, and it was a very good finish. So we raced that and it really went quite well. The interesting thing was getting a telephone line down the course.

Our interview re-continued on 11th November 2010 at the Arnott's residence, 37 Cranbrook Avenue, Rose Bay.

Jerry: Bob, I want to continue where we left off in Thredbo, and I am now aware that I may have missed a section when you went overseas for the first time in 1951.

Bob: In 1951 I went over on my first trip to Europe to ski, and John Wagner had arranged for me to ski and train with the Belgian ski-team in Serre Chevalier, just before Christmas. I well remember it was deep powder snow, and very light, and then very hard ice underneath which made it quite difficult to ski on. I had bought myself some rather stiff downhill skis in Paris on the way, and they were rather hard to control on this. They were the only skis I had during the first half of my trip. Up to Christmas in Serre Chevalier we went up as far as Val D'Isere and they had a 'low countries' race meeting there and which I was allowed to have a run in the slalom. Then I went on to Zurs which was the place where we knew Ernst Skadarasy who had taught in Australia, was located.

Jerry: He ended up in Australia?

Bob: He taught in Australia sometime in the 30's I think, he was one of the first Austrians to come out.

Jerry: He taught at The Chalet?

Bob: Mainly at The Chalet but he went backwards and forward.

Jerry: How did that 1951 trip finish up?

Bob: It was with the Belgians at Val D'Isere and then I set out to Zurs where I knew one of the Austrians, Ernst Skadarasy at that stage ran one of the hotels and after a while there I got this idea to run in the Arlberg Kandahar and I mentioned it to Ernst. He said "Why don't you come with us, I am taking the Austrian Team to Sestriere."

Jerry: I thought the 'Kandahar' was run in Austria?

Bob: It moved around, Sestriere on this occasion. I had the most horrific racing experience of my life. The slalom was staged quite high and there was a four thousand feet drop down onto the road, which as a FIS race would never happen nowadays. It only ran the first three thousand vertical feet and it started off on this very straight steep drop. Zeno Colo, an Italian, who eventually won it - a backwoodsman, he was a very tough looking character - he started off at the top with seven or eight great skating strides.

I started off and when it flattened down a bit, after you got up a good speed, and again it got faster; and I have a picture at one stage of myself in the air. Anyhow my eyes started watering. I had new goggles and I couldn't quite see what I was doing except that I was going very fast. When I could see I was about a foot away to the side of the damned track and I am going about 60 mph, so anyhow I slowed down a bit after that and I was still going about 60 mph.

Jerry: Coming back to the Australian scene, I gather that the Australians of the time did not have as much experience in the 'Downhill' as they did not have as much opportunity to practice on such terrain as in the Alps?

Bob: There was quite a testing 'Downhill' at Hotham, the 'Varsity Drag' at Hotham, quite fast and quite varied. Most of the Downhills in NSW were on the Main Range, the important ones, or they would try to get them on the Main Range which was all pretty open. But at Hotham you were going through the trees all the time and the same thing happened when we were at Falls Creek. You were always in the trees and I managed to get one across the thigh once coming down to the finish.

Getting back to Zurs, where all the Australians were going to be and I was hoping to see Ernst Skaradasy and others. It was really a very pleasant visit and the instruction was excellent; this was I think before the days of Leonhard Erharter but the lessons were already pretty good.

There I met David Allen who flew Liberators over the Pacific during the War, he was on his way to England and he was going to buy a light aircraft and fly it out to Australia. Then he said "Would I like to go with him?" And I thought this is one of those occasions that it only happens once in your lifetime, and you either do it or don't do it. So I said "Yes."

Sometime later we were in England and we met the Adelaide sculptor John Dowie. John came out to where the aircraft was built. he did the big fountain right in the centre of Adelaide, he did that. he also did some abstracts and he also did the Queen twice, he was quite renowned. Anyhow on this occasion we brought a gentleman with a spray gun and Dowie stood beside the tail, and I reckon we finished up with a very nice kangaroo on the tail.

Jerry: How was the flight back?

Bob: It was pretty 'upsy-downsy', we couldn't fly much higher than seven thousand feet. We were in a Percival Proctor, one engine, and its range was about seven or eight hundred miles.

Jerry: How many stops did you have to do?

Bob: Thirty four; Paris then Nice then Rome then we flew straight through to Athens, though we may have stopped on the Italian coast, Brindisi I think. We were a couple of days in Athens, then Cyprus where we stayed with the British Commissioner. From Cyprus I think we went to Beirut for fuel then Baghdad, there was a Royal Air-Force station there and we spent about three days with them because it was the last place where the Air Force, very kindly, used to take care of the aircraft as well. It was up around 110°C and we flew from there to Kuwait and there in the middle of the day it was 128 degrees and the aircraft wasn't very keen on taking off. We felt comfortable we would get over the fence in the end but it was a little closer than you could have wished, and then we went on down the Gulf. We spent a night in Bahrain and then we went on the next day to Zahra.

From there to Pakistan, maybe Dacca, then we went on to Jodhpur where the Indian police wanted us to fold back the wings so they could look for contraband, and they wanted to look in the wings. We had trouble persuading them that it was not a good idea for us to fold our wings back.

From New Delhi we went on to see the Taj Mahal and then across to the Ganges. By the time we got to fly down the Ganges, the air traffic people said we could not go down that way, but our schedule would have taken us towards some mountains to the south. We were not at all keen to go near any mountains, so we took off going in the right direction. As soon as we lost sight of the airport we turned back, and about 2 hours later we started getting messages of, 'lost aircraft'. They

did not know where it was. Anyhow we got to Patna on the Ganges and landed there. As soon as word got out they lost interest in us.

We needed fuel at that stage and so we decided to stay the night there. We were just talking about getting a hotel when one of David's connections, I think someone involved with the oil companies, found us and said "Come and stay with me, you cannot stay in one of these hotels". He was one of the local Rajas or something so we spent the night with him and then we flew down the Ganges dodging the monsoon, big thunderheads around, dodging them down the river and onto Calcutta.

Jerry: From Calcutta you had to hop over the Indian Ocean to somewhere?

Bob: We were going to hop across to Aqua? up in Burma but the clouds started really gathering around so David took us back up the head of the Gulf and we went into Chittagong. We were lucky because there someone there said "You must come and stay at 'The Club'."

Jerry: Where next?

Bob: This is a good one, we stopped in Rangoon and then we went to Kuala Lumpur and I remember a monkey climbing in the tree outside in Kuala Lumpur. Then we flew onto Singapore and we started to have a little problem with the engine, so David got on to Arthur Butler who was running his airline in Australia at that stage. He decided we needed a new magneto as it was misfiring so he put one on his next plane to come up and it duly arrived and we were in Singapore for several days.

We then flew over the Indonesian islands, stopped at Bali for a night and then we headed off for Dili but we found we got a very strong head-wind. From up in the air you could see the surf and the waves sweeping everything off. We were aiming for Copán but we were not going to make Copán so we headed down to Simbavha Baser that is the islands down to the south.

When we got there it turned out that the strip was just a strip - a strong wind - it was dead - a cross wind. Anyhow in we came and we bounced a bit and we were going in for fuel but we found the tanker had not been able to get in; they scrounged a bit, which was enough to get us to Copan.

So we took off, a bit late but it got dark as we were approaching the coast of Timor and actually we hit the coast but with so much wind around and everything. You could just see the lights reflecting and stars and the coastline, but nothing on the land, no lights. It was a bit of a toss up but David made the right decision; we turned left and the lights of Copan appeared. Suddenly he had to announce himself on the radio, and no answer, but suddenly there was a babble of Indonesian and so David was getting all ready but you could see the strip, a coral strip it just stood out in the moonlight. We both thought he would get down ok; it might have been a bit bumpy, but suddenly, an Australian voice appeared on the radio and we had heard in Bali that there, a light commercial aircraft had been ferried out to New Guinea, two pilots on board and one of them had taken over the radio. He told us that if we can hang on a bit he would clear us; so we got down quite comfortably.

Then the next morning David looked at the aircraft and found that it was one of those interesting landings as he had broken the tail wheel. He screwed it off - he was a lawyer by the way. He took it into town to stick it all together again but he found they actually couldn't do it. So who did it? David.

Jerry: So from there where?

Bob: From there to Darwin back in Australia, then we made two stops, I can't quite remember where, back home.

Jerry: On the racing scene back home, before you took off again on your 2nd trip, what happened in 1952?

Bob: Well yes, we did go skiing. (*Laughs*).

Jerry: (Laughs) Where were 'The Olympics' in 1952, Oslo?

Bob: I went over separately to join up with them (the Australian ski-team) and I think we had some races in Bad Gastein.

Jerry: Did you race for the team at the time?

Bob: Several went over at different times, I remember there had been very little snow in Oslo and the 'Downhill' and 'GS' were always going to be further up country because there wasn't a long enough hill around Oslo. The alpine racing, we only had the slalom in Oslo but there was a big enough mountain some 70 or 80 kilometres further north, up country at Norefjell in Norway.

Jerry: So you ran the 'Downhill'.

Bob: Yes.

Jerry: You ran the 'GS'.

Bob: Yes.

Jerry: And you ran the slalom.

Bob: Yes.

Jerry: How did you go?

Bob: (*Laughs*) Well it was interesting because some of the top teams had been to look at the slalom course before they got up to Norefjell. They arrived with lumps out of their skis where they had hit stones as they were going down the slalom course. and that did not look very nice.

Anyhow we had the 'Downhill' and not being one of the highly rated people, the running order puts the highly rated ones first and then you tail off. I started off behind a Greek, there were probably one minute intervals or something like that. The Greeks were always going to be in the Olympics because the Greeks started the Olympics and they were always entered. The start of these races, particularly in minor countries, are often fairly straightforward: the Greek disappeared and I was sent off, and we came to a traverse, it was fairly steep and the Greek had fallen down a hill, underneath, and so I passed the Greek. Then the same thing happened to me, I fell down the hill, and he passed me, and then I got up and I managed to pass him again. I don't remember the GS at all but I saw a film of it the other day actually.*

*V G Wesche wrote about the Olympic Winter Games 1952 in the Australian Ski Year Book No. 25: **'The Downhill.** The men's course was over one and a half miles at Norefjell with a descent of 2,400 feet. Snow was so short that a lot of shovelling was needed at the finish. Most of the course was a 30 ft. Trail through trees. Trees, rocks and corners were padded with straw.Billy Day was again our best performer, coming 60th out of the 91 starters, in spite of a bad fall. Patten was 67th and Arnott 71st.....

The Slalom. The course Roedklevia was described by Arnott as "steep at the end and hard to the extent of being a first cousin to pure ice." In spite of vigorous protests by Mr Arnold Lunn, who was referee, a second run was only allowed the first thirty-three as the authorities were anxious to preserve the course for the women's event the following day. Billy Day made a well controlled run of 73 sec. (the fastest time was 59.2 secs.) and Arnott took 81.1, coming 53rd and 64th respectively of the 90 starters. Patten was 75th. In this run our first two overcame all the other lowlanders except Boyagis of England, a better effort than we were justified in expecting. In fact Arnott wrote "I think we quite surprised some of the locals."

Jerry: Following the Oslo Olympics getting back to The Chalet, Hotel Kosciusko, and the high country what happened?

Bob: Well there was one really crucial time when Karel Nekvapil one day suggested a little trip out to the Thredbo valley and took 7 or 8 of us out including me and Christine Davy. Christine had just come back from Europe and we got out and looking down to the Thredbo and Christine skied down through some trees, and gee, that is real skiing. So we had to get her on the team.

Jerry: Why do you think that particular trip was that relevant?

Bob: Yes well when I looked down into the Thredbo valley, and I realised was that one of the reasons that I was interested to go was that it was protected from the westerlies. An awful lot of the racing that we had been doing up till then, particularly if we had to do it on the Main Range, could be very unfavourably affected by the westerlies and particularly if it snowed. Whereas down there you were going to be protected from the westerlies, and to climb back out it wasn't that hard to get back to The Chalet.

Jerry: What about 1953 and 1954 and what about your first meeting with Tony Sponar?

Bob: Well the first time we started getting involved about Thredbo would have been after 1952. I had decided that this was the place I had wanted to ski, and I don't think that we got together until after I had raced the George Chisholm course.

Jerry: In what year?

Bob: In 1953, that was the first time it was raced.

Jerry: Was Tony racing in it?

Bob: Tony may or may not have been there I don't know but it obviously brought attention to the Thredbo valley; Tony was probably looking at the Thredbo valley before that. But after that we started looking particularly at the Twin Valleys area together.

Jerry: Was that in 1953 or '54?

Bob: The summer of 53 and 54 we went through there, but mostly we would have done it on snow up to 53, but after 53 we thought the course was not long enough, it would be better if it got further down, if we could bridge that left hand creek.

Jerry: Are we talking about Twin Valleys or Thredbo?

Bob: No we are talking about Twin Valleys.

Jerry: But it is pretty hairy down the bottom there.

Bob: It's quite fun, Tony and I used to ski right down to the river. He would be up there and we would ski down to the river and he would get into his jeep and I would climb back over to The Chalet.

Jerry: Where did he get into his jeep?

Bob: They were building the road up, at that stage it was a bit of a track. He got the jeep across the river from Twin Valleys.

Jerry: That would have been 1953 or '54?

Bob: That would have been '53.

Jerry: And you then whacked back up to the ridge?

Bob: Yes, back to The Chalet. I worked with a very pleasant German physicist in the Snowy - he had an office actually - a very quiet person actually, Erhard Timmel. I was wanting to cut this extra bit of course and he volunteered to come along too. We used to go up on weekends and we camped. We had a lovely little place on the ridge, part way down off to one side where we could camp and then go down with our axes. Neither of us was much good but we made some progress and things rather overtook that once the development went up.

Jerry: This was all with the aim of making the Downhill a run-able course.

Bob: The objective was to make it long enough for international standards, the terrain was good enough. It needed to be not that much longer. We were down there cutting away and we heard voices approaching in the distance, and it was Rudi Worth. Rudi was a Swiss and he taught and sometimes he would run our races. Anyhow Rudi arrived with one of my old friends Bruce Haslingden who had a place just next to Cooma airport and two girls. Rudi and Bruce both had axes and they set to. They could both use axes, and they made more progress that day than any other.

Jerry: How was the run down there in the winter of 54?

Bob: I don't think we had a Downhill; it may have been less snow ever. Somehow I think that I wasn't there and I think they ran a Giant Slalom from high up down a slightly different track, there was a big lump of rock where you come off the flat. The course I had came down one side and under a ledge and down to the creek, and I think George took the GS down the other side of the rock and wound down there and not come down as far.

Jerry: What about 1955?

Bob: I don't remember, I would have gone overseas at the end of 1955.

Jerry: In that relationship with Tony in 1953, '54, and '55 did Tony voice an opinion in thinking about his development in the Thredbo Valley?

Bob: We were looking at places with the possibilities of development. Tony had his eye on the present place, and he also very sensibly wanted to look at other places too.

Jerry: With his eye on the present place around 1956, there must have been a decision?

Bob: I think that the decision was made at the end of 1955. That was probably the last time I was up there. Sponar took me up in his jeep and we went up to the present site and then we turned around to come back. I had to agree that from a development point of view it was certainly easier than Twin Valleys, because you could have the village on the river whereas you would need a mile or so of road to get up to that site.

They were good sites but at that stage the possible company - I don't know if there even was a company at that stage - could not have afforded to build a bridge across the river and secondly,

could not have afforded to build that much road because it is not a cheap business. The present site does have big advantages.

Jerry: So by 1955 the road went all the way up?

Bob: Yes by '55 Tony was able to - actually on the way up he took a side track to get around one part of the new road. When we were coming back we hadn't gone very far and there was a whizzing noise and apparently we didn't have any drive to the back wheels, there was a bolt that had come out, the axle had slid back, the thing had come apart and indeed we did not have any drive to the back wheels.

So Tony was not a gentleman that was easily put off by these things, he was very good really. He just took the rear drive shaft off, if I remember, correctly and said, 'OK we'll go on front wheel drive', so we went on front wheel drive and then he did an uncharacteristically stupid thing. From the place where we had turned off the side track before, he did not turn off the side track, we just kept going straight on and it wasn't very long - not one hundred yards or so - before we were sitting down, until the main body of the car sitting on the mud, so what do we do then? Tony got out with some fencing wire and tied the thing to a tree and there was me lying on the ground to pull the thing out, Tony was revving the engine; so we got it out and we headed off around the track and got to number 2 creek. We got through that and we got to the other side but with drive only to the front wheels we didn't have enough strength to get up the hill, so what can you do? So out came the wire and out came the little handle, got underneath it and eventually we got the car up.

There we were in front wheel drive and approaching the present entrance station to the Park and suddenly there was a whirring noise and we were in 'no wheel drive', at about 10 o'clock at night, the moon shining, funny how you can remember these things. Tony got out and a screw had come out, so he found another screw and screwed it in. We got in at one o'clock and Elizabeth had dinner waiting. I didn't see him again for quite some time as I went overseas.

Jerry: So you went overseas at the end of 1955.

Bob: End of 55 with the team, we were in France and then Christine Smith was due to race in Bad Gastein in Austria and I said I would drive her across. John Wagner was managing so he volunteered his wife as a chaperone. The three of us headed off and we headed up the Rhone valley and you go over into Italy over one of the passes, we came over the tunnel to the other side and it was snowing like stink, with a lot of snow on the road. We got down the valley and the lake was black, snow on the roofs, huge trucks on the autobahn, anyhow when we got to Venice we didn't get the turn off correctly to Venice so we were heading out along the causeway out of Venice, so we stopped and had dinner.

We got back into the car to go to the next town, I'll always remember that because when we got back onto the main road I suddenly realised that I was on the wrong side of it, I was sitting on the curb all right, but the curb I was sitting on was on the wrong side.

When we got to Cortina for the 1956 Olympics I was there as kind of a spare official, John Wagner was at the high level cocktail parties and I attended the captain's meetings. This is where I learnt about just how messy it was determining where you ran because the rules, I think said that the best runners went first, because there was no points system in those days.

Jerry: You mean FIS points and we are going to come to that aren't we?

Bob: We are going to come to that yes, but actually this is quite important to the lead up, because the chaos that went on in these meetings, and they went on until midnight or so, to how to sort out the running order.

Jerry: To sort out the running order, how did they do it?

Bob: “My bloke he ought to go first because he won here, and there, my bloke won this, and this, and this” - would go on and on and it was after that that FIS decided that they ought to have a formal points system.

Jerry: You remember that Frank Prihoda was in that Cortina Olympics?

Bob: I remember the most interesting thing that there was a tremendously long slalom winding its way down through the trees. I think there were about 100 gates or something like that and FIS produced a new rule after that limiting the number of gates you could have, only up to 70 or 75.

I remember I was standing in a nice place to watch this, down through the trees, and I saw Frank come down and he was taking it fairly carefully and he got right through to the end, and I wouldn't have. I like to attack my slaloms and the reason I wasn't in the team is that I had a bit of a misfortune in the Australian Championship's. There was an up and coming bloke, Jimmy Walker and he was a bit faster than me on the first run and then the 2nd run I heard he got a good time, and I thought Jesus I have got to go, and I got into the flush and I went straight into it and I took a fall.

Jerry: You bombed out.

Bob: I bombed out, that bombed me out.

Jerry: You reckon looking at that Cortina course you would have bombed out too?

Bob: I don't know if I would have made it but I would not have tried to go through as with the other run.

Jerry: So how did you get involved with FIS?

Bob: While I was in England there was a FIS congress in Yugoslavia I think, and I wrote to the not very active secretary of the Australian Ski Federation and said I could get down to it if they wanted me to, and he never replied to my letter so I didn't go to that. When I was back in Australia in 1956, Peter Blaxland who was a much more active secretary; I said to Peter “Well I am going back over to Europe and I could go at the time, to this congress in Athens, would you like me to go?” Actioned forthwith; and within two days I was booked in as the official Australian representative.

Jerry: Was that held in the same year?

Bob: Yes I attended the first meeting in Athens in 1956. When I arrived, the top Englishman Robert Readhead was there, he was on the council of FIS. I arrived about 7 o'clock in the morning, he came over and said “Your first meeting is at eight, the Downhill Slalom (later Alpine), committee meets at eight and you should be there”. So I got to the Downhill Slalom meeting and started a busy meeting, the business of the meeting was concluded, and it was not a bad meeting.

The next meeting was held in Costanza, Romania. Around this time or later? it was decided to have a sub-committee, to handle the points and I think that there were suggestions for it already. Bob Beattie from America who used to manage US teams, had another proposal, and someone else had had a proposal that hadn't worked.

So we had a committee meeting just before the French Olympics in 1958 in Grenoble. We had a meeting up in the hills with our sub-committee and Elsa Roth, who was the Chair of the committee had tried to use my system and hadn't applied it correctly and had got some silly answers. We looked at Bob Beattie's and it had some drawbacks - both systems had drawbacks. We sat there, Bob Beattie, Elsa and I and after some time in the wee hours, and eventually, the two systems both had faults, but they tended to iron out each other's faults, so we thought, well, average them, and so we decided to average them and that's effectively what has worked ever since.

Anyhow the same Englishman who was on our committee announced it the next morning that we were going to do it that way and he said, 'oh, the two-Bob rule'! From a very English point of view it was very good.

Jerry: That was more or less the conceptual aspect of getting the FIS rating system going, the Beattie method and the Arnott method combined?

Bob: Yes that's right.

Jerry: When you came back from overseas and in 'this place', that you knew and skied in, all of a sudden there were some lodges there, what was the first impact of that?

Bob: There were two points of view; it's a good resort, particularly in the early years you could ski from the top down to the river for about 6 to 7 weeks of the year. The thing it didn't have which we had at the other place, was an international Downhill course; international GS and slalom were alright. We had a top Downhill authority with us one year and Kurt Lance and I went out and we picked out a course which would come out on the Golf Course and finish there, which would have been really quite good and the company was reasonably keen on it I think, but the Parks said; "Oh no, you can't do that." In one little place you had to cut through something that they dearly loved, and so what they call 'Funnel Web'. Kurt went out and sort of laid out Funnel Web and we thought we could race down that, but Kurt was enormously good with a lot of things, but he didn't have an eye really for a racing course; you couldn't race that course, no. I don't think you could use it even for a GS actually.

Jerry: Too many trees, just too close together?

Bob: You could imagine running it if you could put up nets everywhere where they were needed.

Jerry: Just getting back to FIS and the points system, are there any other points you would like to mention Bob?

Bob: After a year or two Elsa retired from the Chairmanship of the Classification committee. An Austrian, Sepp Sulzberger, became Chairman and he was like a lot of Europeans, not very happy that we had a rule which had nothing 'European' in it. It was by an American and an Australian.

Jerry: Do you remember which year he took over this Committee?

Bob: Offhand I don't. So he got a mathematician from Innsbruck University to look at it and unfortunately he didn't explain how it had arisen, and the algebra, putting the two systems together, had produced a formula (*phone rings*). There was no acknowledgement of the rationale behind that formula, and looking at the formula itself the rationale wasn't at all clear. There was quite some uncertainty about this for some time but we kept using it and it kept producing reasonable results.

Jerry: You kept using the Arnott/Beattie method or the Innsbruck one?

Bob: The 'two-bob' method. It became accepted, though quite sensibly there were some small adjustments made, but that was it.

Jerry: And it continues to be used to this day?

Bob: I am not in touch any more, but yes, or some derivative of it, whether they had to change anything at all I don't know, they didn't for quite some time.

Jerry: When do you consider you finished your active membership of FIS Bob?

Bob: About 1988; as an honorary member I was still able to attend meetings and speak if I wanted to.

Jerry: You continue to serve as an honorary member of FIS?

Bob: Of the 'Classification committee'; Kurt Lance is an honorary member of the 'Alpine committee' I think. It is now the 'Alpine Classification' committee.

Jerry: Well Bob thanks very much for your input, for a very interesting and informative interview, we covered a lot of ground especially in respect to your involvement in FIS.