

VALE: "Bob" Arnott (1922– 2016)

Bob Arnott played a significant role in the development of skiing in New South Wales. He was a Winter Olympian, a FIS delegate, a member of the Ski Council of NSW, scientist and computer engineer, an author, a life member of the Thredbo Historical Society and an ambassador for the Friends of Thredbo Development Fund.

Born in Sydney on October 13th, 1922 and christened William Robert Arnott, he was the great-grandson of William Arnott, who founded Arnott's Biscuits. His father, Henry Dixon Arnott, was a barrister and President of the Royal Aero Club of New South Wales.

Bob Arnott attended Cranbrook School where he excelled at sport. In 1935 on a school excursion, he first experienced skiing at the Hotel Kosciusko. From then on he travelled to the mountains each year to ski at Charlotte Pass until 1941 when the Chalet closed down during the war years.

He was in the Air Force for a brief period during the war, but the family decided he would be better off going to the University of Sydney. After graduating as a Bachelor of Science in 1945, Bob began work at the AWA Materials Research Laboratory, researching the effects of humidity on electrical equipment.

It was not until the International Services Ski Race meeting in 1946, that he began ski racing as a member of the university team. The interest in ski racing continued at Mt Buller and Mt Hotham, whilst working for the Post Master General's research laboratory in Melbourne between 1947 and 1948.

"By the late '40s, Bob had established himself as one of the top Australian racers of his day, posting strong results at home and in New Zealand. 1950 his sights were firmly set on representing Australia at the Oslo Olympics of 1952." (Axel Arnott, 2016). On his first ski trip to Europe in 1951, Bob trained with the Belgian and British ski teams before returning to Australia in a Percival Proctor piloted by his friend David Allen. They made 34 stops en route doing some sightseeing en route in India and then island hopping to Darwin via an unscheduled landing on a coral airstrip on Bali.

Arriving in time in Australia for his successful selection for the 1952 Olympic selection trials. At the 1952 Winter Olympics held in Oslo, Bob Arnott represented Australia in the Downhill placing 71st t out of 91 starters, and in the Slalom he placed 53rd and 64th out of 90 starters. Following is Bob's account of his run in the Downhill which was run on very little snow:

"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 the race was fair straight forward: The Greek disappeared and I was sent off, and we came to a traverse, it was fairly steep and the Greek had fallen down the hill, 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 with a schuss to the finishing line." (Bob Arnott, 2012)

Bob continued to improve his ski racing technique whilst he worked for the Physical Sciences Branch of the Snowy Mountains Authority based in Cooma on his return from the Winter Olympics. It was at this time he became aware of the good skiing above the Thredbo Valley and with the approval of the Park service felled the necessary trees for a downhill race course in the Twin Valleys. Winning the 1953 Australian slalom championship, Bob captained the Australian inter-dominion team to New Zealand in the same year.

Moving to England in 1956, Bob began to work with Ferranti as a logical designer for their new computer laboratory and over four years he worked on the Pegasus, Perseus and Apollo systems. Around 1960, he transferred to Ferranti computer sales department. This brought him back to Australia to set up their sales office in Melbourne.

1963 was a special year for Bob. At the Ski Club of Australia Race Week at Thredbo he met the winner of the ladies' slalom, Simone Pirenne. They were married in 1975 and by 1970 had two children, Adrienne and Axel.

Skiing played a major role the Arnott's family life and both children trained for a number of years with the Thredbo Ski Racing Club. At ski races in Thredbo, Simone was always Chief of Gates.

Bob Arnott was appointed as the first Australian member of skiing's international governing body, the Fédération Internationale de Ski (FIS) and attended the 1963 congress in Athens. He served on FIS for 27 years, initially on the Downhill/Slalom Committee and later the Classification Committee on which he remained an honorary member for the remainder of his life.

At Bob's memorial service, Axel Arnott eloquently explained the circumstances leading up to the introduction of "2-Bob Rule":

International Skiing needed a better method of ranking it's skiers and assigning start positions for each race. The higher in the order a racer started, the greater their advantage because the race course deteriorates with every racer, especially in those days. The existing system essentially involved a small room filled with large Austrian coaches yelling at each other until the officials could take no more. Something had to be done.

So Dad, the physicist set to work developing a system that could account for the many variables necessary to rank different skiers, competing in different races, on different courses and conditions. He created a system that worked quite well, but he knew it had it's problems, it tended to overweight some variables. Meanwhile Bob Beattie a US representative to the FIS was working on an alternate system, and it too had it's problems.

With the '68 Olympics at Grenoble fast approaching and plenty of pressure to solve the problem, there was a eureka moment late one night when they realized that if they combined both of their systems they tended to cancel the errors out acceptably.

It was introduced in 1967 and while it has had some modification since, it still the basis for ranking skiers around the world today. It's affectionately referred to as the 2 Bob Rule."

For a number of years Bob served on the Ski Council of NSW which later became the NSW Ski Association. In 1981 he participated in a ski plan for the development of new ski areas including The Chimneys and Twin Valleys amongst others.

Bob Arnott's book "Seventy-Five Seasons – The Ski Club of Australia" 1920 – 1994" is an amazing history of the club which he joined in 1950. When he decided to write the book of 180 pages with its excellent black and white, and colour plates, he thought it would take one year. Five years later the book was produced.

Nearly every year, Arnott raced in the Thredbo Masters Giant Slalom competition. The last time he competed was in 2010, placing 6th in the Men's 75 & Over at the age of 88. His ski finale was at Thredbo's inter-club races the same year, as a member of the Ski Club of Australia where he was known as "Rubberlegs".

Bob Arnott's passing was mourned by his wife Simone, his children Adrienne and Axel, father in law of Oliver, dear brother of John (deceased) and Karen and much loved grandfather of Hugh and Charlotte, together with over 200 people who attended the Memorial Service will be held for him at St Mark's Anglican Church, Darling Point on February 4th, 2016. The service was followed by a private cremation.

Note from the editor: THS is grateful to Adrienne and Axel for supplying their eulogies which were of assistance in compiling this tribute to Bob Arnott.