

THREDBO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ALOIS (LOUIE) REINSTADLER

**An oral history conducted by Edith Swift
13 July 2013, Griffith ACT**



Louie Reinstadler on 2m 10cm skis in 1964

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ALOIS (LOUIE) REINSTADLER

interviewed by Edie Swift, July 13th, 2013 at 29 Stuart Street, GRIFFITH 2603

Louis, I would like to find out about your early years. First of all would you mention your parents' names and your grandparents' names?

My grandparents were Kaitan and Elisabeth Reinstadler, on my mother's side Elisabet and Wendelin Riml. My father's name was Josef Reinstadler and my mother was Aloisia. I was born on September 16th, 1930 in Sölden, Tirol Austria.

We were five children and we grew up in a rented house in Austria, in the Tirol. In my early childhood I went in the summer up in the meadows looking after the cows, and in the winter I went to school.

After the school years, I went and learnt the trade of tailor. From there I went to work in the hotels. I went into hotels in Switzerland and Austria, where they have a common border, and then I decided to go to Australia.

Did you learn to ski there?

Oh yes, as kids we had to ski so we could go to school.

Now tell me about the skis and how you skied?

The ski equipment – the skis were from the planks from the old wine barrels. Planks with a strap around the foot and I had a pole like a stick.

And your boots?

They were the boots we wore in the summer and in the winter, for climbing and running around. There was no special equipment.

How did you turn on your skis?

At first we went down the hill, straight. But as kids we all challenged one another and eventually we turned around – no problem.

Then the equipment changed during the war and after the war especially. I was working and I could get myself a pair of skis. These were 2m 15cm – far too long for me but I could get around on them.

From there, I was once helping in the ski school. Then I decided to go to Australia.

Now what was the ski school?

The ski school was in Tirol, in Sölden, and Hoch Sölden and there were about sixty or seventy instructors at the time.

Can you remember some of their names?

There was the ski school director was Serafin Tender and his assistant was Max Arnold. One of the instructors was a very famous Austrian skier – that was Eberhardt Kneisl. There were quite a few pretty good racers in the ski school. I could have gone permanent in the ski school but I didn't want to because I had already made my mind up to go away.

Now what year was this? That you were in the ski school?

It was in 1956. In 1957 I went to Australia.

Were the conditions very bad after World War II?

In our village - not. I had to do my apprenticeship in our village as a tailor, because in the city there was no accommodation and not much fresh food. I couldn't go to university and study because after the war that was not on.

As an apprentice I worked twelve hours a day at fifteen years of age. But that was common. So I decided there was an easier way for a better living, so I go to Australia.

But the skiing would be different in Australia.

Oh yes, much different. Over there you have got the climate. Here the snow is not dry enough and the slopes are much longer in Austria.

So how did you get to Australia?

I decided when I was instructing that I wanted to have a cheap journey somewhere. I went to the Immigration Department and I asked them. They said "Where do you want to go?" and I said "far away." They said "You can go Canada, America, Australia?" But they didn't accept anyone speaking German after war in New Zealand.

So I said "I'll go to Australia." Then I came to Australia and I worked in a factory in Sydney.

How did you get here?

By boat.

Did you come by boat?

Yes, five weeks on a boat, "The Flaminia". and we were twenty five people in the cabin. That was an old boat – a troop carrier. We came to Maitland to a migration camp called Greta. The Immigration Department gave me a job in Sydney.

I had to sign up to work for two years here and if I didn't like it, I can go back, but for two years I had to pay the tax to cover the cheap transport. From there I worked in Sydney in a factory. The camp was out in Villawood where it is now. I had everything organised there - food, accommodation, everything was perfect.

From that factory, I decided to go to the snow. There I got a job in Thredbo as a kitchen hand and cleaning, and that was in 1959.

Where did you work?

In the old Lodge, a hut which at the time, was the hotel.

And what was it called?

It was called the Thredbo Lodge. It was the first building. They had about twenty four rooms and I was the kitchen hand. They also had a restaurant for the people to come in and have lunch or dinner. That was in 1959. I liked working in the kitchen. It was good.

I have to tell you that in 1959 they got the first snow in Thredbo at the end of July. But they had all the people there and the Austrian ski instructors who were talking how good they were, but I had never heard of them in Austria. I remember the old juke box, and you put the money in it and no one would dance with me because I was the kitchen man. But when the snow came I went up with my skis, up on the hill and skied my bum off, and in the evening I had a lot of friends.

After that I went and worked on the chairlift. They had built the chairlift in Thredbo.

Which chairlift?

The chairlift in Thredbo which went only as far as Kareela . The Kareela Station. That was the finish of the chairlift and there after they extended it up to the top, not to the present top, just over the ridge.

I will never forget - I was there in the summer and in those days you could still drive up to Kosciuszko. But there I was up on the top station, and three young New Zealander boys came with their axes, crampons, ropes and all that - ice picks - and they asked me “where is Kosciuszko?” I said “It’s just in that direction” and I said “Have you got a car?” “Yeah, down in the car park” and I said “If you go down, you drive up Kosciuszko.” These boys, they just collapsed .

The old company in Thredbo, they sold out to Lend Lease. Thyne Reid was the chairman of the old company. He came to us and said “Boys, I am selling out to a good company. Do you want to buy some shares?” We didn’t, but we should have. I think one share was worth five shillings.

Then the new company extended the lift again, which is the present top station. Then in the summer, with my brother Seppi, and Rudi Schatzle, we worked on the ski trails in Thredbo – cutting bushes.

After that Seppi and I went over to the Kosciuszko Chalet which was run by NSW Government. In 1962 they were going to sell it. There were a few skiers in Kareela Hut, they made a syndicate and they bought the Chalet from the government. They called it the Kosciusko Chalet and it was run by the Broken Hill Holdings. Savo Stankovich was the manager.

And where was the Kosciusko Chalet?

Where it is now. It is still there.

Up on the Main Range?

No, just up from Perisher. So we went there. They were building the lifts and all that. But they had the really bad winter of 1964. I was up on top station running the lift. There was 31 days of blizzard. In the operator’s hut I had three marine wind gauges, two of them on either side – on the Kosciuszko side and on the Thredbo side and the wind got so bad that it blew them away. It went up to 106 miles an hour or up to at least 250 kilometres.

You didn’t have to stay there did you?

Yes, I had to stay there. It was the top station and I had accommodation there. On the top station was myself, Adi Richter and Dieter. I stayed in the top station and it was a very well built structure because the roof was anchored down into the surface rock. It was good.

Wasn’t it cold?

Oh no, we had electricity and a fireplace. The snow cat came up with supplies and bits of wood so we could fill our fireplace.

And how did you get the food up for the winter? Was it all at once?

Oh no, the Snow Cat brought it up. But that lift, in some places it was under the snow. There was so much snow. I remember when the blizzard settled down a bit, we could see a bit further than the platform and we looked out like children.

So did you dig it out?

Oh yes. We fixed the damage. Sometimes we could and sometimes not. It was on the top of the ridge and it was so exposed - three kilometres goes over the Main Range - we couldn't dig through that. In Thredbo or Perisher you could see where the ridge tops are but up there we couldn't. The lift was too exposed, too long, so after two years it just didn't go anymore. It was a bad paying proposition.

What year did they quit?

It should have opened in 1963, but it couldn't because of Department of Labour and Industry inspectors and the weather chased them away. In '64 they opened it on the Long Weekend in June. It was good but after that the heavy winter in July with 31 days blizzard and the chairs swinging in the wind - there was a lot of damage. So much damage to the chairs - some of the clamps were cracking.

So were you teaching as well?

No, I was working on the lifts. After that, in 1965 I went down to the Chalet and worked in the ski hire. Then in 1967 I started to be an instructor at the Chalet.

And who was the head person in the ski school?

Heli Summerauer and then when he left, I was in charge.

Who was there beside you, the other instructors?

There was Martin Walker, Rudi Klemm, Peter Gerloff, Walter Klemm and then there were others coming in when I ran the ski school. There was also Randy Weiman who is now in Thredbo.

How did you run your ski school? What did you teach? What method and what were the skis like?

The skis were steel. They were long skis with cable bindings. After in the '70s then the short skis came in and that was a complete change.

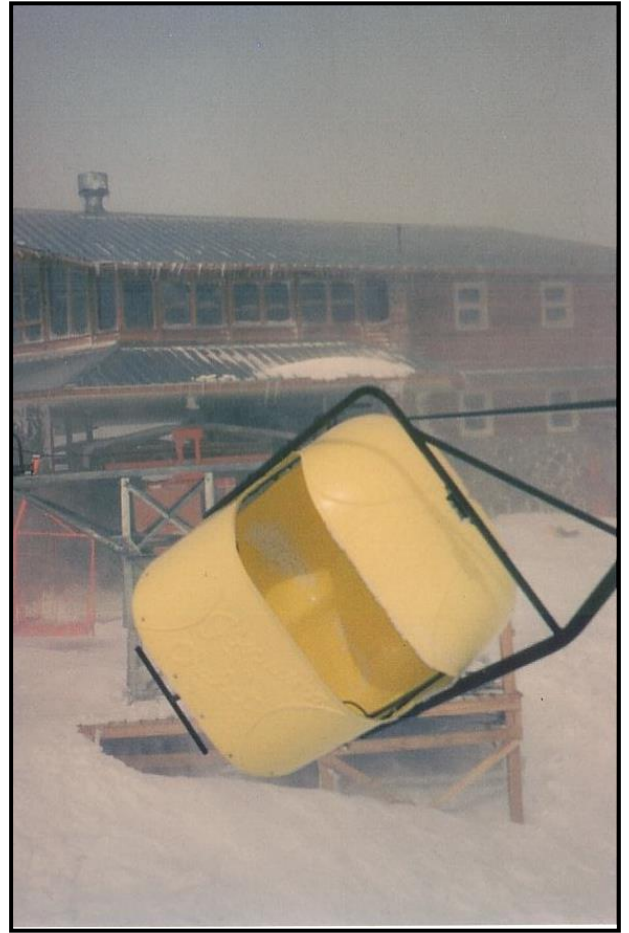
So how did you teach then, compared to what you did before?

Actually the same.

How?

The Austrian technique.

And what is that?



A Charlotte Pass Alpine Way chairlift seat swinging in high wind as it leaves Belle Vista station. The restaurant is in the background.

You start off with walking, side stepping, snow plough, then snow plow turn, then stem christie, then parallel christie and then parallel, with fast skiing after that. People coming to the snow, they think they can learn more and more in one week. When they come back next year, they have to start again. One week of the sport is not enough but you can have fun.

What were the boots like then?

Leather, the lace up boots. But in 1965 the buckle boots came in. The ski pants went down into the ski boots. The buckle boots were good. If you wanted to go inside, then 'chuck, chuck', your boots were off.

How was it different in the '70s? When the short skis came in, how did that make a difference?

A lot of difference to the people because the movement of the skis were much easier than the long skis – much easier. I have always found out that when I have young people coming to ski, they learnt it in no time. They have no fear. They have the determination and they learn quickly.

And your method, did you do "down, up, down" and that was after the introduction of the short skis?

Yes, because with the long skis you had to edge hard to stop from sliding and then change direction. And now it is more with the knees with the short skis.

And the pole plant? How did that change?

The forward plant, they are still using it. People come with a bad habit of planting the pole beside the ski boot but the skis are still moving, then they over-turn. The pole plant is only to give you the direction of the next turn and it should stay like that. With the pole plant beside the boot, you twist, you spin around.

How many people did you have in a class?

Nine to fifteen. With the beginners you can handle fifteen people. But when you have good skiers, no more than ten. With a good skier, you ski in front of them, one at a time. You bring them together, stop sometimes, watch them and then change them around, so there is not always the same skier behind you.

So what came after that? Were there new things? Did the skiing improve after the '60s and '70s?

The short skis, the carvers, they made such a difference. But I ask myself "why didn't someone think of that 50 years ago?" But not only that, even the slopes. Now they have got the machines to prepare the hill.

And how far back was it when there wasn't the grooming at the Chalet?

In the late 70s actually they started.

And they had the Bombadier?

They had the Bombadier for transport. Then they got in the Kässbohrer machine, compactor and they could make a few acres flat.

And before that?

You had to side step it with the skis. When you had fresh snow, the best skiing was in the afternoon because it was packed but not in the morning.

You had to side step and make it good yourself? So all your instructors had to do it?

Yes, and the people. The people were placed side by side, not all in the same track, and side step up to prepare the area on which to teach.

How did they get up to the Chalet, the transport?

The Tucker snow cat, it was already there when I started at the Chalet, and they already had the old Weazels. The ones the Americans used in the Pacific War. The government had a few up there – they were alright.

And they got their food in during the fall? They couldn't bring it in during the winter.

Oh yes, they could. Once or twice a week the transport went out as far as Perisher to get the supply.

And the building- was it very nice in there for people stay?

Oh yes, over a hundred beds at the Chalet. It is still almost the same now, like it was then because the Park Trust doesn't want to change the outside much. In the old days, the bedrooms had bunks but not anymore.

The clothing, was it much better in the 70s?

The clothing is much better now. Now you can dress yourself up and go out in a blizzard. Sometimes it was cold - there were no overpants – just the ski pants and long johns.

Did you go into the 80s with your skiing?

I am still skiing but not instructing.

What did you do in the 80s?

I got married, came to Canberra and worked in construction, driving machines and digging.

So you were there skiing in Thredbo still, but not instructing?

No, not instructing.

So when you left the Chalet, who took your place?

Martin Walker, and then they got a Canadian in. There was also a hotel manager from Canada and the head instructor was also Canadian, but now – I don't know.

Did you find the skiing much better than in the 80s and 90s?

Yes, the equipment is much better now.

What made it better? Was it the equipment?

I had these carver skis. The longer skis, they were always the same, they did not have much waist so if you pushed down, the front lifted up and chattered. But the carvers, you push through and the front steers you out of the turn – they are fantastic.

What do you think of the helmets?

I don't wear one. May be I should. I think they are good.

Why don't you wear one? Why is that?

I don't know, but I think I should wear one.

They are much warmer. How about the goggles?

Oh yes, the goggles I like. I always wear sun glasses, I wear glasses even when the sun is doesn't shine

What did you do when you retired from construction?

I retired when I was seventy.

Did you ski then – all that time?

I went down in my holiday.

Where did you stay in Thredbo?

In the Christiana Lodge. I belong to the Southern Alps Ski Club. They have a lodge in Thredbo, one in Perisher and one in Charlotte Pass.

And which one do you like best?

I like Thredbo the best now because, you can drive in and you are there, unload your luggage and park your car there. If I go to Perisher, I have to unload my luggage at Bullocks Flat, go up with the train, then a snow cat to the lodge.

If I go to the Chalet, I have to catch the snow cat shuttle. If I have only one week's skiing. If I go to the Chalet, I lose one day up and one day back. If I go to Thredbo, I put the luggage in the car, I get to the lodge, put on my skis and I am skiing.

You do racing now?

Yes, but only for the club. I like the racing. You have got the gates, and there is no one crossing your path. Last year I got hit by a snow boarder and a skier

Where do you race?

In Thredbo.

And where are the ski gates when you go?

They call it the Rossignol Run in Thredbo. It is about fifteen or twenty gates. It is only for clubs – there are about two hundred racers in the Interclub Race.

Through the years, did you race in all those years you were in Australia?

Only in the winter – only for the one week.

And how did you do?

There are some young members there, they have been members of the Olympic team, so I couldn't beat them!

Do you go back to Europe? Have you gone back to ski?

Yes, in the summer. We ski in my village, up on the glaciers where the first World Cup Race is run every year. In 1965 I went back and started to instruct over there again for the winter.

Where was that?

In Austria, in Tirol, in Sölden and Hoch Sölden where I come from.

And for how long did you do that? How many years?

Only one year, then I said "I've had enough of that."

Was it any different?

No it was the same system. In '67 when I left the Chalet, and came to Canberra and started a family, then I didn't go skiing for a few years until the kids were about five or six years of age, then we went up for a week always. When they could handle the lift a bit then we went up for two weeks every year.

They like skiing, do they?

Oh yes.

Now did you want to say anything else about skiing before we close the interview?

I'm glad my children like skiing. They are good skiers. My son and daughter went over to my place in Austria. They were working there and skiing for a winter.

What did they work as?

In the restaurant. The son could have gone into the bar but he couldn't speak the language so he had to clear the tables.

Did they like skiing there?

Oh yes. They really picked it up because there they have these long runs.

How long are they?

Our village is 1,300 metres above sea level, and there are three mountains, all over 3,000 metres, with lift access for skiers.

How long is that in miles?

That's a very long way. A good skier would only do three to four runs a day.

That is over a thousand feet.

We'll conclude now. Thank you very much from the Thredbo Historical Society. Would it be all right if this was donated to the Thredbo Historical Society and it can be transcribed?

Yes

Thank you very much.

Chalet to Thredbo Chairlift Story

by Louie Reinstadler

In 1962 the NSW Government put the Chalet on the market. Some skiers from Kareela Hutte in Thredbo formed a company and bought the Chalet.

They decided the Chalet should be connected to the Alpine Way by way of three chairlifts. Three chairlifts became too expensive so it was decided to build two chairlifts. In 1963 Transfield started to survey and clear the lift line. One gang put in the footings for the towers and the next gang put the towers up.

The Chalet had old Weasels which were left over from the War in the Pacific. They also purchased a Bombadier. Transfield had some jeeps and some Dodge six-wheel drives. Chains were put on all the wheels as everything needed to be transported along the lift line. Transport was going twenty four hours a day. Everything for the construction of the towers need to be dropped off at the right place. From the Alpine Way, Transfield built a flying fox to the top of the tree line. The rest had to be transported up from the Chalet.

Sabimo, a construction company, built all the eight platforms, at the Top Station all staff accommodation and a restaurant; at the Alpine Way the staff accommodation and a coffee lounge. They also refurbished the Chalet, the staff accommodation and the ski hire. Rough accommodation was also built on Bella Vista for workers. Some were camping at the Alpine Way and some stayed at the Chalet.

Every day a lift tower was erected. Work was going on all over the mountains. To get the power to the Chalet, it needed a trench, dug by hand from the Alpine Way to the Chalet. The terrain was so rough, a lot of gelignite had to be used. It was surprising that no one was killed.

When people arrived at the Chalet looking for work, the foreman told them to follow the trench line and look for Carlo or Guiseppe and they will give you work. Some of them did this and others turned around and went back out through the Valley.

The electric cable came in 500m lengths on huge cable drums. Because of their weight, they could not be pulled over big rocks. It took about seventy people just to lay it into the trench.

Transfield installed the drive units and the transformers up at the top station. The pulley batteries had to be put up on the towers, then the chairlift cable had to be run over the pulleys. The chairs were put on, then everything was ready to run.

When the chairlift was started, it was realised that the rubber on the pulleys was no good. The lift had to be stopped. As the snow came early, Transfield started to run behind in their contract. The lift was not working, and they eventually pulled out.

In the winter of 1963, Benni Zeller was caretaker on Top Station. He came down to me at the Chalet and said "the weather at the Top Station is so different to the weather at the Chalet that the lifts will not be a success."

After the winter of 1963 the dispute between Transfield and the Chalet was settled. The company E.P.T took over the contract. They put new rubber on the pulley batteries and the lifts were ready for testing once again. They also found, once again, the rubber was no good. The rubber was replaced for the third time. This time the rubber came from America and proved to be strong enough for the weight.

By the end of February 1964, we were able to have trial runs with the lifts. The Department of Labour and Industry (DLI) came to test and approve the lifts. On all the platforms there had to be an operator and on all the chairs had to be a weight equivalent to two people. The lift then had to go forward and backwards at full speed.

Herbie rang up from Belle Vista station to tell us that there were no more chairs coming through. The lift was stopped and we walked down the lift line with the DLI and to our surprise there was a derail on Tower 36. The cable had come off onto the inside of the tower. As the chairs came to the tower, they were ripped off. There were about half a dozen chairs on the ground. The DLI said we had to weld metal plates onto the batteries to stop the cable jumping onto the inside of the tower. A low voltage cable was also needed to be installed as a safety measure between the drive units and the pulley batteries. If anything happens, this stops the lift.

The Park Trust and the DLI said if there is a breakdown in a blizzard and people need to be rescued, you must have a rope from tower to tower for people to hold on to so they can't get lost. Also under the platforms, there had to be an enclosed shelter and by Tower 36 there had to be another hut. All these shelters had to be fitted out with rescue equipment, including food and first aid equipment, and a kerosene heater.

In April and May, 1964, the DLI came for a few days for the final inspection. This time the lifts were passed and ready to operate. The lifts were officially opened on the June long weekend, 1964. Louie was put in charge of the chairlift.

On the June long weekend, the chairlift was quickly filled with tourists and skiers. On Sunday at 7 pm the last of the skiers were finally loaded back to the Alpine Way. By the end of June the weather had closed in and a blizzard started which lasted for thirty one days. There were two marine wind recorders fixed to the operator's hut. Both were ripped off by the wind. The last reading, before being ripped off, was 106 miles an hour. It became so bad, it was frightening. The wind must have reached at least 250 km per hour. Some days we could not do any work outside at all. If we could get outside, all we could do was shovel snow.

At the Chalet the guests were given a day ticket to shovel snow, which they could never use as the snow came faster than they could shovel. When the weather broke and we could see out past the platform and down the lift line, between Rights Creek and Stillwell, from Tower 11 to 13 we could see that the lift was under snow.

In 1964 all the resorts had the same problem. Cooma even sold out of shovels. Our engineer went into Cooma and brought some gelignite. He thought he would be able to blow a channel in the snow to free the lift line. He did more damage than good.

When the lift was running again we were able to bring in supplies from the Alpine Way. By the time they were on their way down to the Chalet, the weather closed in again and another blizzard had started. With the high winds, the lift to the Chalet derailed with all the supplies on, and it was snowed in for the next two weeks. Eventually the lift worked again and the supplies made it to the Chalet, still fresh and frozen.

Good skiing was had by all up to the end of October. Even on fine days the lift had problems with the winds. With winds over 80 km per hour, the lift could not run. With the lift being exposed for such a long distance, from Bella Vista to the Chalet, the winds swept across from the west which made lifts unstable and unreliable, and the people started to stay away.

The tour buses had to take the lift ride off their itinerary. Once a busload of tourists caught the lift from the Alpine Way to Top Station to have morning tea. The weather changed suddenly. I knew I had to get them back down quickly. I went into the restaurant and informed the tour guide of this. They were loaded onto the lift and sent off. The lift stopped and he knew there was a derail on Tower 36. I told Adi to stay at the drive unit while I skied down to put the cable back on. The lift was not stopped for more than fifteen minutes. They all arrived safely at the Alpine Way no knowing what had happened. We were so pleased that all were safe.

In the evening when I went down to the Chalet for a drink, the manager called me into his office. He told me he knew there had been a derail on the lift and that I should have let him know. I told him that I had to make a quick decision that I knew was safe. He then proceeded to tell me that he was the manager and he made all the decisions and if it happened again he would sack me. Can you imagine these tourists being taken off the lift, none of them having the proper clothing on and having to walk down?

In the summer of 1965, Southern Alps Ski Lodge was being built. The shell of the building was up and the roof was on. There were no windows in. The weather turned and the high winds came. The wind and the vacuum lifted the roof off and it ended up in the trees.

As I mentioned before, lifts running for such a long distance and exposed to high winds could never prove to be a success. As the running costs became too high and the lifts became too unreliable, the company decided to close down the lifts.