

THREDBO ALPINE MUSEUM

IVO DEUBLER – An Oral History

**Interviewed by Jerry Krejzar at Ivo's Farm,
1392 Alpine Way, 26th August, 2013 and
'Grindelwald', 39 Townsend Street,
Jindabyne, 29th July 2014**



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JK: Ivo as you would know The Thredbo Historical Society has asked me to record your oral history about your life and skiing career. Ivo when were you born?

ID: I was born on the 3rd August 1939 in Salzburg, Austria.

JK: Can you tell me a little about your parents.

ID: My father was with The City Council and my mother was a housewife. I was born just at the beginning of The World War; my father had to go to war, and one of the first things I remembered about the end of the war was when the Americans marched into Salzburg. Austria was part of 4 different protectorates, the English, the Russians, the French and the Americans. Salzburg was run by the Americans, which was by far the most popular occupier. They all had a lot of money and they all loved little kids, so that was quite fun.

JK: How long did that occupation last.

ID: It was from 1945 to 1954; the Americans were very easy, well-liked and popular and also did a lot for children, arranged competitions, billy-cart darbies and things like this.

JK: But life must have been pretty tough.

ID: It was, there was very little food to be bought then, and I remember my parents paying a farmer on school holidays, paid the farmer so I could get proper food to eat. Because directly after the war as I said food was very scarce, and even when you did have money it was very hard to find and very hard to get, but still, we didn't really experience extreme hunger but it was just very poor. When my father came back from the war he told me he was a very keen skier, a very enthusiastic skier.

JK: Did your father ski before the war as well?

ID: Oh yes, he always skied, father was very sporty and in those days there were hardly any lifts anywhere so we used to just walk uphill, and ski down again.

JK: In the Salzburg area?

ID: In the Salzburg area and a few years later The City Council had a ski club, built a lodge in the mountains, and that became very popular but we still had to go from

down in the valley up to that lodge, carry everything up there. The material, lifts people couldn't ride, but they did take some food and supplies up.

JK: Do you remember much about the equipment at that time.

ID: Oh yes it was the old skis with the Kandahar bindings, steel edges, you were very lucky; and then came the hickory skis, anyone who had hickory skis was just a lucky person, and most of them had steel edges.

I was talking to a friend of mine from England, in Edinburgh, Clayton Stamm; he went to school in Switzerland and he learned to ski in Switzerland about my age, and they had the same problem. They called him 'Stamm' and he has a house in Jindabyne, he goes to Perisher racing club, but he doesn't race; so we talked about skis the other day, and he talked about the wooden edges and steel edges and said exactly the same thing.

JK: For how long did you live in the province of Salzburg?

ID: I went to school; I learned building as a trade, for three years, I did National Service in 1960.

JK: In 1961 when you came to Australia, did you emigrate and what was the reason?

ID: I just wanted to see the world and either to choose South Africa, Canada or Australia; and I had a sister who came here a year before I did and she said that she liked it very much so I decided on Australia. I was only going to stay here for three years, just to see the world.

JK: Where did you move to at first?

ID: I first moved to Bonegilla; it was on one of the first flights I came in, most of the immigrants came by ship and it took three days and I developed a big boil on my hand and the people in the know said I would be better off in Bonegilla because of the medical facilities there. But I was only there for one week and then they sent me to Melbourne where my sister was waiting for me. My sister was once on one of those Murray tours which she arranged from Melbourne, and she met this German guy from Cooma and he offered her to come back to Cooma and live there, and so she did. So I remember paying for her plane ticket from Melbourne to Cooma.

In 1961 there was a bit of a depression in Australia, but I did get a job with Archeton Construction in Khancoban, it was quite big in the Snowy's, it was the beginning of the shopping centre in Khancoban. It was my first job in Australia. I knew about the snow in this country so on weekends I just hitch-hiked to Thredbo and Perisher, to have a look, and I stayed overnight at Leo's Lodge which was Bursill's and now The Denman; Bill Bursill owned it and Leo and Maria used to run it and called it Leo's.

JK: I remember it well as I used to stay there as a boy too.

ID: Did you, it was a lot of fun, that's where Cees met Anne with that duke box in the corner, and every second song was 'Ramona' that was their love song, I remember that really, really well.

JK: Presumably that is where you met the Director of the Ski-School, Leonhard?

ID: Oh yes, Leonhard, and what happened, that's right, Leo Pockl and Bill Bursill, they did that big extension to the dining room and Bill Bursill's flat upstairs and some rooms and they were a bit behind with their building and so when I was a paying guest at Leo's he showed me around, and I will never forget there was a hole in the ceiling and Leo said 'oh gee those bastards should have fixed it', and though I was a paying guest I said 'oh I can fix that', so I just fixed the hole in the ceiling and then Leo asked me to come back the next weekend to help him finish before the season started so I came back and helped; he picked me up and then Leo asked me to give notice down there and for me to come up full time; because we went ahead very quickly with the building for I was quite a good builder, and that's how I started off in Thredbo.

JK: Did you start skiing that year?

ID: That first year I became friendly with the Ski-Patrol, I even skied in their red jacket that first year, with Tommy Tomasi, Danny Coleman and those boys; the guy from Tathra, and Adrian Studley; and in 1962 I started to instruct. There were only a few of the Austrian boys. I am sure you have seen Helen Swinbourne's book, there is a photo of myself on my birthday with all the ski instructors on the one table, that wasn't a big table, there is a photo of us in the book. Leo's wife Maria had her birthday on the same day as I did so we had a big dinner.



Leo's Lodge - 1962

JK: So you joined the Ski School in 1962, what do you remember about that first year?

ID: It was a lot of fun, oh in 1961 I raced as well, and I became a member of the NSW team and I came 2nd in the National Slalom with a 215 Kneissl ski, to ski in the Slalom.

JK: That's a long ski for the slalom!

ID: That's the only ski I had.

JK: The National Championships, where was it held?

ID: In Cabramurra, Leonhard was the forerunner, and I came 2nd to everyone's surprise including my own.

In 1961 at the end of the season I bought the garbage contract from the previous local owner for 1,500 pounds with the truck, which was a lot of money, and that was good fun, because I could do the rubbish run in the morning and be back in time for ski-school; and that was 5 pounds a day in the early days which was excellent money, so I enjoyed that.

JK: Did you do that for long?

ID: I did it for four years or maybe five, and then the company took it over and employed someone. Because when Dusseldorp bought the resort in October 1961, Lend Lease bought the resort in 61, and they started to build the first stage of The Hotel and I used to let them have my truck to cart building materials around for one pound ten an hour, and I did not even have to drive, they specified the driver and that was terrific! So that was one of the early highlights, so I went fishing every day with Leo.

JK: That is interesting because Leo also taught me to fish, as a 14 year old. What was the village like in summer in those years?

ID: It was very, very, small of course, and I had to go around the village twice a week and I got five pounds every day which was just huge you know, and I started to do sub-contracting, stone walls and things, I built Palmer's Lodge that big veranda, I did lots and lots of things in Thredbo, mainly stone work; all local stone, we used to get the rocks out of the river. Now they just about put you into jail if you did the same thing.

JK: When did the national Parks put a stop to this?

ID: Well I am sure we weren't allowed anyway, but nobody said anything, we went to the river threw the rocks in the truck and that was it; they were the early days.

JK: Which were the favourite lodges you worked on?

ID: Well the first one was Palmer's Lodge which now is called Schuss, built by the Palmer family who were one of the first people in Thredbo in 61, their first year in Thredbo, the Palmer's had the Big Bear the supermarket in Sydney, which is a bit like Woolworth's and Coles. I did a lot of work for the Company, as a sub-contractor; and in the winter it was the Ski School. The company had a hire car to pick up the executives from the airport, and they asked me to drive the hire car. I could meet the morning flight, then Ski School from ten to three and then meet the afternoon flight; and then they offered me the plates for nothing, it was my hire car.

JK: How long did that go on for?



ID: I think it went for about twenty seven years. It was mainly Cooma airport, Canberra airport, some trips to Perisher, it was always a set rate and that was quite good; I could do the Ski School and ski Monday to Friday and from Saturday to Sunday I just drove.

I trained hard the very next winter, taking some poles up and trained every day and that's when the chairlift fell down, on the 3rd August 1962. In theory they were supposed to take the rope around the bull-wheel at the top, in theory it was fully loaded and the engineer in charge activated the switch and the whole top station came out of the building; the whole system gave way because of what they did; as it was fully loaded, and the night before it snowed more than half a metre of snow and that is the only reason nobody got killed. I remember it because it was on my birthday.

JK: Were there people on the chair, was it a full chairlift?

ID: Yes a full chairlift, Leo was on it too. And it was my birthday and I borrowed Leo's car to go to Cooma with my girlfriend, and in winter you worked seven days a week in the season, and it was my birthday so I go to Cooma. In Jindabyne in the old township of course, the guy at the service station said there was a phone call, I had to go back to Thredbo, the chairlift fell down. I said 'bullshit' chairlifts don't fall down and I go to Cooma and I heard it on the radio.

JK: Luckily it was your birthday and you weren't there! Was there havoc when you got back?

ID: I got back in the late afternoon and everything was cleared up. The lift did not work all winter I don't think.

JK: So what did the company do?

ID: They had a T-bar on the right hand side of the middle station, which is the T-bar they moved up to Merrit's. People just walked up there.

JK: You mean the one we used to call the 'Ski-School T-bar'?

ID: Yes, yes. It was a very strange season, and then they re-built the lift for the following season and added another 50 metres.

JK: Let us go back to 1962, the Ski School, what would you like to say about the early days of the Ski School?

ID: Yes, well the Ski School was very well known and a tight knit community; I think originally with seven or eight instructors, and when I first started I think there were thirteen or fourteen of us; and then it built up fairly rapidly, from 1966 it became bigger and bigger.

JK: From 1962 to 1966 did you have a lot of work in the Ski School?

ID: Oh yes, right from the start the Thredbo Ski School had the highest standard from anywhere, and because all the Austrians were basically with those qualifications, they are like professors of skiing; you know they would go to sports university and all those things. It would cost a huge amount of money to get the higher degree or certificate; and in Thredbo everyone knew everyone and that was a good thing about it of course. That community, well they were just the high days.

JK: Did you take certain classes or a certain standard or did you vary them?

ID: No I varied them, but mainly I had the lower classes because it is very important to look after the learners, and I must have been quite good at it as they all came back. You know you always had a bit of a rating with the turns and things, and it is quite funny because if you have the higher class, the smart ones, they think they know more than the ski instructor in the higher class, which they don't, and in the lower class they progress so much quicker which gives them a much happier feeling. Because the higher you go as in class one and two you more or less stay the same; in class five and six and four and three, you improve out of sight, which of course gives you a stronger feeling of satisfaction. Lots of people don't even think about it, but when you think about it, like when you do your first run in The Basin after you learn to snow-plow on the Monday, and you can ski down The Basin on a Thursday, the thrill people get out of that.

JK: What were the techniques taught in those days?

ID: Techniques were extreme, extreme Austrian techniques which were very good, and then they changed to, I would say basically World-wide International technique which they still call the Austrian technique.

JK: How does that differ from the basic Austrian technique?

ID: Not all that much. The way they developed that technique in Austria at the Sports University; they put kids on skis and filmed their movements without telling the kids what to do; which means they learnt to ski in the most natural way and then imitated and modernised those movements all the way from the first steps on skis to the top class. To me this is the natural way, get some young kids tell them to do this and this, and then film them, and film every movement.

JK: Which instructors did you know, was Ferdl around?

ID: Yes Ferdl was around, Ferdl was funny, in The Keller, he did the shuttzplatte, and he broke his Achilles tendon! Doing the shuttzplatte and he was out for the season.

In the early days there was Hansi Psurtscheler, and Sigi Wolf and there was Sepp Pucherhauser, he was there for quite a few years, and Helmut Stein who ran Helmut's Ski World Tours, yes Stein was quite a prominent member, and black Walter and white Walter, (one had black hair and one had white hair, it wasn't white it was just very blond). Walter Perwein, that was the white Walter, and Walter Auer that was the black Walter who is down the Mornigton Peninsula.

In those times they were so few of them so whenever there was a cocktail party the farmer's used to come up and book a lodge or a club lodge and bring their own chef with them, and basically the whole village was invited. So everyone knew everyone. I remember in 1961 or 1962 Brian Henderson the TV man was up there on his honeymoon, he stayed at Bill Bursill's place because he was a friend of Bill's. In 1962 Murray Rose who created a world record in the 200 metres, I taught him to ski which gave me a lot of satisfaction.

JK: How well did he ski?

ID: Very, very, talented, he was very well coordinated, fit and strong; he was a personal friend of the Bursill's. And there was Ken Myer, he was very famous and very well known. Ken was a keen skier he was a wonderful man; once he visited my mother in Salzburg for lunch, that's how nice he was. Ken he used to do a lot of fishing in summer, he would come up, and I remember he always made sandwiches with the leftovers from breakfast and put them in his bag; nobody could believe him, that's just what he wanted to do and that's you know, he was a lovely guy.



Thredbo's ski instructors, 1967. - L to R, standing: Helmut Steinoecker, Ivo Deubler, Heini Larese, Leonhard Erharter, Gerry (-), Geoff Meridith, Karl Berchtold, Helmut Pfister, Sigi Wolf. Seated: Vic Dalzeil, Walter Auer, Brian (-), Walter Perwein, Herman Muchenschnabel, Gernot Schaermer, and Hannes Kurath.

JK: What about Leonard, did you get on well with him?

ID: Yes I got on very well, sometimes we called him God which he quite liked. No, Leonard was good, the good thing he was strict; certain standards, certain dress standards, and that's why the Ski School had such a good name.

JK: What about Dusseldorp?

ID: Dusseldorp was a bit jealous of Leonard, because Dusseldorp owned the place and Leonard always let him know that Leonard owned the mountain. At the get together a few years ago, when Dusseldorp came back from Tahiti where he retired, and they sent Leonard a plane ticket to come over, before Leonard died.

JK: Which year was that?

ID: I would say it was about seven or eight years ago, Jodi had the restaurant already, so I would say it would be about eight years ago; great speeches, Bernti was still alive, and it was at Bernti's for the get together, Kasee was there, all the

old people from the 60's were all invited. Dusseldorp was great, I really thought a lot of Dusseldorp. When he first came he had a Lincoln Continental, the first time I had seen a car with cruise control, and that was fifty years ago. The first time I never knew the cruise control existed; he flew his private plane to the airport and I drove the car from the airport to Thredbo, so that was quite funny.

The early 60's to the mid 60's were the highlight years of Thredbo, and then it just became more and more a numbers place instead of a people's place which it is now, turned only into a numbers only place.

JK: What about that big season 1964?

ID: 64 was of course the biggest snow season ever, you could not get into Thredbo for a day and a half. It started to snow on the Saturday late afternoon and Thredbo was completely isolated for a day and a half and we all jumped over Kareela hut and things, you know we found that we did that quite a few times. There was a good power supply down at the bottom station, a big generator which could supply in those days most of the village, so power was not a problem, I remember that clearly.

JK: From 64 onwards how did the mountain change?

ID: The mountain improved every year. Rudi Schatzle did most of the trail cutting, as a contractor, built Ramshead in 1963 and the Basin T-bar, which was great because the helicopter pilot was a good drinker, he drank the beer twice as quick as everybody else, that was quite exciting. Then they started to develop Merrit's, that would have been about 1967, because I put in the water supply by hand. I dropped off the two inch poly-pipes by snowcat the winter before, where it was going to go to Merrit's from Merrit's creek, I had to build a little dam as well. I put a price in per foot; with one helper and we walked up and down every day, we built that before the construction road was pushed through, it took us about between 28 to 31 minutes to go up, to walk up from the village, and we would run down at the same time that the chairlift would take, the Merrit's chair.

JK: You think it was in 67 before Merrit's got going?

ID: It must have been because in 1968 that's when the kids died.

JK: Jerry Kucera's kids.

ID: Jerry and Norma's kids; because we had to go and look for them, ski patrol and the Ski School, we were called out to search for them at night. The girl first and we couldn't find the boy, and we had to go up again at one o'clock in the morning or something, and had another real search. The girl died because she sat down on a rock, and the mistake the kids made, they followed the creek in the water.

JK: Merrit's creek below Anton's T-bar, jungle country.

ID: Yes it is. It was a nasty day and they only opened Merrit's and at lunch time they announced over the PA system that Crackenback was open and the two kids went to ski over to Crackenback and slipped under the rope and they thought that

would be a quicker way, and they finished up in the never-never. They tied their two skis together, leant them against a tree and went into the water and followed the creek in the water and the girl sat on this rock fairly close to Creek station, fairly close to there. She was waiting for her brother and she must have been exhausted and lied back with exposure, and we found her and we couldn't revive her; so we carried her out and then we had to go and look for the boy. The boy was



in the same pool at the top end of that pool, must have slipped, knocked his head and drowned. The amazing thing was that they took their skis off and followed the waterway in the water, they could have managed with their skis on.

JK: If they had experience.

ID: They had experience they were good enough skiers, that surprised us all, and nothing would have happened if they had kept their skis on. There were footprints all the way down before they went into the water.

JK: What else do you recall around that time?

ID: Shortly after in 1968 we had another death; Dr Barbour, who missed the last chair from Merritt's, climbed over the fence, and the operator's had stopped the chair as it was after hours, and he was stuck on the chairlift. And Dr Barbour decided to climb hand-over-hand on the chairlift rope, and of course he lost his strength and dropped down into the creek and he was killed. Very sad, it was a very sad year, it was also the best year of skiing ever; from the 23 rd May to the long weekend in October we could ski top to bottom without snow-making, there was no snow-making in those days, and it snowed every week and the sun was out every week. It was the best season ever.

JK: What about the season's after that?

ID: Well there were good season's' and not so good season's. The last really bad season was 1982.

JK: When did you start the rafting business and what happened

ID: The rafting started in 1972, for about three years, it was quite an adventure. We went for two days, spent the night on the river; it took a bit of organising, we had to pay someone to pick us up in Khancoban and it was quite dangerous in many ways. I gave it away because I did not want to come out with a body. The other people that had taken over, I think there were two people that died in that same stretch of river and that is why I gave it away. We had a nice article in the 'Walkabout' magazine about those days.

JK: Up to what year were you still living in the village?

ID: Yes we were looking after 'Golden Eagle' lodge until we built the house, and then Prue and Max Parker took over the management of the lodge in 1978.

JK: How long did it take you to build down at 'the farm'?

ID: It took me one summer, I started on the 2nd January 1978 and we moved-in, in the middle of June in 1978. I built the place full-time, it was quite big, and it was the wettest summer we ever had, from the end of February it never stopped raining, it was quite hard to do everything properly.

JK: After you built the farm, did you go back to Thredbo to teach?

ID: I only went back to teach in school holidays, and I was still running the hire car business at the same time. I used to always go back up to the 'Black Bear' on Wednesday and Saturday night's until Kurt Brandauer left 'Black Bear'; they were the best two nights Thredbo always had, and they were always booked out. They were fun nights, the 'Austrian boys' would always play music, sing and dance; of course there was a lot of schnapps to be had and the Jindabyne police always had a table booked. The officers came up, and after they were picked up by a colleague from Jindabyne so they wouldn't have to drive drunk home and I could drive home safely behind them as there was no one to stop me after having a schnapps or two. I knew all the boys of course, quite a lot of fun in those days.

JK: What were the changes to your lifestyle once you settled in at 'Ivo's Farm'?

ID: Once or twice a week I skied with guests when I wanted to, and basically that was it, I worked too hard. Our place was very popular and Hannah had normally one helper in the early days, and then ran the place by herself.

JK: What happened when the 'Ski-tube' was being built?

ID: I got the contract to stone-face the terminal in 1987, with four helpers, John Ahoe, Ronny Duncan, (we used to call him 'Ronny Dollar'), and Bernti also helped me a lot; I gave Bernti his first job after he had that car accident on the way back from Sydney many years ago. It took us six weeks, and after that I did all the other work around the Ski-tube around Bullock's. I built all the culvert's, outlets and waterways and I built the workshop and stone-faced the walls.

With the Ski-tube there it was easy for me drive down to Bullock's and to hop on the train and go up in the early days up to Blue Cow. Fritz Seinninger who was the originator of Blue Cow left for Perisher, and I did all the stone work and a lot of maintenance work for Perisher, and I also did a lot of work at Lake Crackenback

Resort in 1988 or 89. I was approached by the people who tried to build the dam to form Lake Crackenback and they asked me if they could take some rocks from my property, so we came to an agreement that they take a hundred truckloads of rocks, gave me a few thousand dollars, which they took by road and it was to everyone's satisfaction. So the dam at Lake Crackenback comes from rocks at Ivo's farm; that is quite something, a bit of history behind that. I did a lot of stonework for Lake Crackenback Resort, and that kept me busy for a few years.

The Ski-tube train was very handy because we could book a train. I remember Jimmy Barnes played a concert for Franz Breitung, at the Perisher Manor and Karl Brunner and I went up, we were invited to meet the band and we asked for a train to pick us up at a quarter past twelve at night, and we had so much fun, and so we phoned down and asked the train pick us up at a quarter past two, it was quite incredible, a funny feeling to have a four carriage train pick up two passengers.

JK: When did you move here from the farm?

ID: We moved here 3rd January 2014. We sold our place and bought this place on the same day, the people who bought our place let us stay a bit longer, to help us move to this place, which was very nice of them of course.

JK: Thank you very much Ivo, we covered a long time period since you came here and your story is very much appreciated.