

## **ALBERT VAN DER LEE – An Oral History**

**Interviewed by Jerry Krejzar - 7 Happy Jack's, Thredbo, 4<sup>th</sup> August 2015**



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## PROLOGUE - ALBERT VAN DER LEE

I was born on 16 September 1935 in Drunen, a small town of about 4000 at the time, in the province of Noord Brabant in the Netherlands. This province is in the central south of the country bordering on Belgium.

Both my grandparents lived in Drunen and both operated their own small business.

My father's father, Bart van der Lee, [1860-1951] was a small farmer and grocer. He was retired when I was born and his wife had passed away in 1930. My mother's father, Willem van Sambeek was trained as a baker and had migrated from Uden, another small town in the south of the country. He found work in Drunen with a small painter-decorator business, operated by two single brothers. In 1900 he married their niece, Anna, who was their housemaid. She became the longest surviving grandparent and lived till she was 97.

My father, Bart van der Lee, was born in 1892, the third of 7 children. He trained as a metal worker, but started a shoe factory with his younger brother Marie and two brothers of another family. He married my mother, Antonetta van Sambeek in 1927. When the shoe factory was sold he started his own business wholesaling shoes.

My mother was the oldest of 10 children. Her home, my father's home, the shoe factory and my home were all within 100 metres of each other. When I grew up I was close to my mother's family. My father's family had by then moved on.

I am the youngest of three children. My brother Tony was 4 years older. He died in 1990 aged 58. My sister Jeanne is two years older and lives in Aarle Rixtel, also in the south of the country. I am very close to her and her 3 children, all living independently now. Her husband Jan passed away earlier this year [2015].

My primary school years were interrupted for a few months near the end of the Second World War. This school was the only one in Drunen, a 20 minutes' walk, 4 x a day. My father arranged extra private tuition in 1945 so I could pass the entry exam of the 'Sint Jan's Lyceum', a special grammar school in Den Bosch, the provincial capital, 12 kilometres away [50 minutes by bicycle].



After 4 years I left to enter the 'Middelbare Technishe School' in the same town. Four years with the third year full time work experience which I did with a road and bridge building firm in Tilburg, one of the larger towns in the province. The other three years were hard work, five and a half days a week, with eight hours tuition and three hours of homework, daily. I served with the 'Royal Engineers' in the army from 1956 to 1958, the last year as a platoon commander with the rank of second lieutenant.

I married Sandra van Genen in Utrecht in February 1960, before migrating to Australia in April 1960.

*Albert van der Lee*

Thredbo NSW 2625  
11<sup>th</sup> October 2015

## ALBERT VAN DER LEE

Interviewed by Jerry Krejzar, 7 Happy Jack's, Thredbo, September 2015

*This is Jerry Krejzar interviewing Albert van der Lee on behalf of the Thredbo Historical Society at 7 Happy Jacks, Thredbo, August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015. We are looking at a transcript of comprehensive recording made in 1995. Albert also made a lengthy speech on the occasion of the Golden Ball to celebrate 50 years of Thredbo, covering his 26 years as resident and manager starting in 1962.*

At high school first two years were the same for everybody. Then you were split up in the gymnasium into two groups, one which was classical and the other, a standard sort of school which would lead to a career. The first one led to university and that sort of thing. In each of these, after the third year you go B for science, or A for languages and for arts. So I finished up in 4B which was enough for me to go to a technical school. They needed a standard like that before you could enter it. So I did that. That was a four years study.

I was actually a bit over qualified to enter that because three years would have been enough. But because I had so much classical stuff, Latin and all that, I didn't have quite enough science and mathematics. That is why I needed four years, so it was a bit of a breeze for me because I was a bit over qualified, which was nice. So that was a four year course with the third year working in practice, doing practical assignments on what you had been doing which was very important because we did it for a year and I think here you only do it for a few months. That gave me an understanding of what labourers and tradesmen had to go through.

*When did you finish your qualifications?*

In 1955.

*How long did you stay in Holland before you moved to Australia in 1960.*

Five years, of which two years was in the army.

*So what gave you the motivation to come to Australia?*

The main motivation was I couldn't save money there. My parents, and other parents too, had this archaic idea that once you started earning money, you gave it to their parents and they gave you a living allowance which for me was not enough because I had seven or eight friends on the weekends. It was difficult for me to return the shouts. As I worked for this road building company, I quickly got rises and I hated giving those rises to my parents, so I quickly pocketed that money. Also I had to be very careful because it is very tempting to fiddle your expense accounts. So I said "This is no way to grow up. I'll never save anything to buy a house, get a family going."

Where I worked, it was obvious I would have had to wait at least ten or fifteen years before I would get into a top position of administration for the company. I was still young, between 20 and 24 when it happened and they put me on jobs where I was working as a foreman rather than an engineer, but that didn't worry me either because it gave me lots of experience. So I decided that I would specialise in construction, not design because design was not my strongest point although I was good at mathematics but if you don't work in a design office you soon lose it.

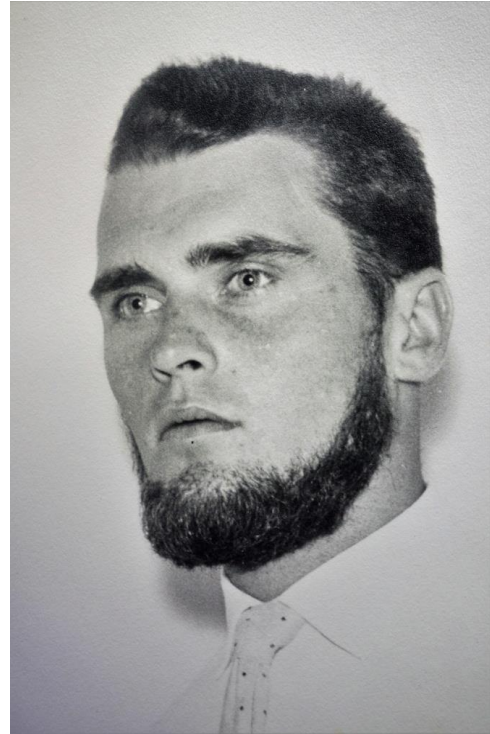
So I decided to migrate. That was done by people and there was a lot of talk about it. One evening I walked into, there was a presentation from the immigration department. They had just been to Australia and New Zealand, the people who delivered it. At the end I said to them, I talked to them, "Well I have made up my mind now, I would rather go to New Zealand because the other countries don't pay anything towards it." The other countries being offered were America, Canada and Australia. They said "Well you are an engineer. In New Zealand it is a bit funny, when they put a pole up it is not quite straight, but it will do." I then said "I will pick Australia."

*So what year was that?*

1959

*How did you end up with Civil and Civic?*

That was easy. I read an article in a women's magazine in Holland, by just picking it up somewhere, and the article was about the Opera House in Sydney, which was being built by a Dutch immigrant who had started a company there, that interested me because I was a bit worried about two things. In Australia and in New Zealand, there is not



much construction work that is going on with private enterprise in road building. It was all by public companies. I certainly didn't want to work as a public servant.

This Opera House was being built by a company, which mainly built high multi-story buildings, and I am afraid of heights, so I said "I'm taking a bit of a risk here", you know. But it so happened that my wife's sister came from Utrecht, they both did, and her sister was married to a Dusseldorp. The brother here, went over to Holland to meet his mother and also for business. Because he where came from a Dutch company called "Bredero" he had worked for a couple of years before he came to Australia, as a construction supervisor.

At his request, he asked if he could be sent to Australia to find out if there were any opportunities to work in the Snowy Mountains. And he did and he came back with glorious reports and he said "Please send me." The company said "Hang on, this sort of work in the Snowy Mountains is not our thing, we build buildings. So they went together with a Dutch company, more into civil work. It was called "The Dutch Harbour Company." They built harbours. So they formed a company. So it got together and he was sent to Australia to form Civil and Civic which was owned by those two companies.

The contract they got this first stage of the Opera House in 1959. I came in 1960. I wrote a letter to this guy. I didn't mention my family relationship because I didn't think that would work because I didn't know him very well and my brother in law, he was a bit of a bully. He took many years to finish his university, which I didn't respect him for it because he was a very intelligent fellow. I think his brother paid for that and he got sick of it. He could have easily finished it. He made his wife work.

So I wrote a letter. I got the address to this fellow called Gerardus Jozef Dusseldorp and he wrote me back straight away and said "You want to come out of your own accord and you want to work. Come to Australia for an interview."

The next day I arrived in Australia, the interview was set for the day after that and I got the work. The receptionist said to me "Mr Dusseldorp has to go away to talk to the Lord Mayor about Rocks development. There will be an engineer in charge of the design department." That was Friday and on Saturday I was at the Opera House. I was there for two and a half years.

*Now progress to when you take up the role of manager of Kosciusko Thredbo under Dick Dusseldorp. You have talked at length about the management of Thredbo. Around about that time there was a little bit of a difference with the Austrian culture, the Austrian instructors at the time and those who started at Thredbo really, with the company to some extent. Do you recall any of this?*

Yes

*In fact that it was even said that you nearly fired Leonhard Erharter.*

That is true, yes but that had nothing to do with the Austrians. Leonhard. He was a very stubborn fellow. I respected his skills. He was a very good ski school manager and he was the top instructor in skiing class. He would come off the chairlift. He had enormously high standards for the top skiers. He didn't have much time for the beginners because he didn't think he could cope much there anyway.

Well the controversy – we had a system which I continued from the previous company. They brought twelve instructors over from Austria, six at one period and six at another period – at the peak season over eleven of them. They were all very good skiers. They all came from Zurs where Leonhard was also a prominent instructor. Also Leonhard had the backing of the Kruckenhauser ski school because he was a top instructor. It goes back to then.

So when the old company went to Kruckenhauser, Bob Arnott I think, went to him for advice for a teacher, he said straight away called on Leonhard. So that is how that happened. But there were a lot of local instructors required for the lower classes. They also had to do their bit too because there weren't enough of them go around. Leonhard was very tough on the locals because they had no qualifications. Some of them had gone to Canada to get some. There was nowhere else in the world. He was quite instrumental in getting that going in Australia.

At one stage there was an argument between Leonhard and the lift operators. They wanted to get the ski school to wait.

*They had a go at Tommy Tomasi too.*

They had absolutely no respect for the ski school.

*None*

And they had not much respect for anybody else. So there was an argument about the lift operators saying "you go one from the class and one from the line" and he said "This involves the whole class. So the class goes through first" and the lift operators wouldn't let him do that. So there was this argument, and he said "You have to do what the lift operators tell you."

*Well he had that God complex, didn't he?*

Oh yes, they said when he went to heaven, God was skiing with Leonhard, someone said “Look there’s Leonhard wanting ski like God.” And they said “No, no, that’s God wanting to ski like Leonhard.”

*That’s a good one. I can remember watching him coming down from Top Station on ice, sheet ice, and he was skiing down slowly putting his gloves on. He was a perfect skier, there is no doubt about it. You recall that?*

Dusseldorp wanted to have private lessons with him and Tom Lewis of course. But they all paid for. He had the ski school under control you know.

*What about the other personal connections you had at that time? You were good friends with Tony Sponar?*

Really good.



*Not so much with Tony Sponar’s involvement with the company as such. Your personal relationship, you travelled together and all that. How did you find it that he had left it and set up his own place?*

Well that happened well before I came here. So I never worked with him. Dusseldorp had respect for him and everyone who came before. So

Dusseldorp said “I want Thredbo to get into racing a bit” which was absolutely unexpected. He had a lot of problems with the company before that. And suddenly he wanted to embrace racing because he thought that it would help Thredbo establish itself as a premier resort. He was right of course. Tony Sponar and Sasha to help us – what racing was all about. Dusseldorp said these Ski Council people, the Ski Federation people, as individuals they are fine but as an organisation it could be difficult.

*So was that the initial time when Karel and Sasha Nekvapil led to the formation of the Thredbo Ski Racing Club?*

No, that came later. Karel and Sasha established ski races for years and they sponsored it themselves, and the juniors came, and Leonhard sponsored that too. Leonhard and Sasha always got on very, very well. They had respect for each other’s skiing of course, Tony too. I had a lot of respect for Tony too. So that is how I got involved with Tony Sponar. He was established at Sponar’s Lakeside Inn for quite some time. He encouraged his only daughter to enter ski races and because there were training



programmes here set by the Ski Council, she often stayed with us here at the Dacha. So we got to know her quite well. So therefore I got closer and closer to Tony and we started to do more and more travelling together.

The Ski Racing Club: I thought of watching those school holiday skiers organised by the Ski Council: city children. The best ski racers overseas were locals, a girl or a boy who lived nearby or stayed with friends. So I talked to Karel Nekvapil about it and to Harold Droga who was the hotel manager – he had a few children. I didn't do it for my children. I couldn't have cared less for ski races or not. But Adrian Studley was captain of the ski patrol and he was doing such a good job every weekend, giving everything he had. I went to him and said "It would be helpful if you could be the captain". And he did. There was my daughter and a few good guys from Jindabyne.

*Kurt Lance was involved at that time, wasn't he?*

Well a bit later.

*I didn't realise that Adrian Studley was so involved.*

Graham Bookalill, the ski instructor, was the first coach. He pushed it along, and there again locals, the son of the local police sergeant, it was all locals. But eventually of course the Canberra, and after that, the Sydney children – there were just not enough locals. It is not everybody that wants to become a ski racer. The local population down there is now so much bigger than it was then. They had to train every weekend as well as the school holidays. The people from Sydney simply couldn't do that, from Canberra yes.

*Going back to the ski school just for a bit. How did that transition take place was it gradually or did Austrians seem to phase out a bit and Rod Dunning and the Australians got more involved in terms of instructing.*

Gradually. Because there was a bigger need for beginners all the time and we needed people like Rod Dunning. I think Rod had some sort of qualification, I really don't know. He also went skiing in the off season in Iran, which he did quite well. In 1975 something happened. Rod Dunning mainly, and a guy, I've forgotten his name, started a strike.

*It wouldn't have been John Olsen?*

Yes, he was a boss. I think Leonhard was not anymore, I think Arnold was.

*Arnold Konrad*

And they had a point, for six or seven years or so nobody had had a pay increase. It was quite hard in those days. So I stuck my neck out and I learnt how Civil and Civic had prevented those situations happening. Without actually asking for approval from my bosses, I simply studied what Civil and Civic had done, which was easy, and we asked somebody in Sydney who was quite experienced in union matters. We asked the NSW Association of Unions or something, which union would best cover these sort of employees. Because the lifties had come up with a "lofty crane driver" who had a certain salary of course and the Australian Workers Union was pointed at.



So I got in touch with the Australian Workers Union in Canberra, which was not in Cooma anymore. They had been a long time ago. We got to talk. They got an increase from us and we drafted a complete new award system for every employee in the company – not just for the lifties and the ski instructors, but also for the village workers and the professional ski patrollers.

*Do you remember what year that was?*

In '75. Anyway the principles were: we pay these wages which were above any possible award you could think of and a few other things. We let go of any weekend penalties because in a resort like this, it doesn't make sense. But I disregarded the five working days including weekend penalties so it became a daily rate because everybody had to work on the weekend. So if you worked less than eight hours, you got less of a daily pay rate and so on. That was one principle.

The other one was we would like everybody to become a member of the union and we collect the fees, deduct them from the wages and hand them over to union – straight into their bank account. And that meant there was no need for a union rep. Also once a week we had a meeting and it would last only ten minutes. There was always a weekly opportunity to air grievances to go ahead.

Secondly if there is threat of strike, then the first thing that happens is: we talk before we strike. We talked with this group of five people. When there is only one department involved, then the relevant representative.

*So we are talking about the five departments*

If all the five departments would be involved.

*We are talking about slopes, lifts, the village and ticket office and the ski patrol?*

Yes. The professional ski patrol, sure. So there was always a group of people. Never one.

*And did that?*

The ski instructors were absolutely against the unions. They didn't like that set up, especially the Austrians, but they had to go along with it and they did. The whole thing became a non-event because you talk every week. If those talks failed, the AWU man would talk to the CEO. If that failed, they would each appoint an arbiter. If that failed, those two people would nominate an independent person and he had to decide what would be done. Both parties would abide his decision.

*Did it remain in place?*



That system ran from 1975. I have no idea whether it still exists. There were other conditions like housing.

*Talking about work practices and personnel, maybe there were some other characters or personalities you could touch on?*

I had a bit of a difficult time with my superiors. But they were short lived. There was a guy who was really sick and Michael Matthews was my long standing boss. He went somewhere else and he came back again. So there were some hiccoughs there.

The real problem was that Dusseldorp was here for five years and his speciality was the Master Plan which is what we talked about a lot. When that Master Plan was done - he came every weekend and we went all over the mountain, sometimes with Kasey, but Kasey wasn't here all the time. So in 1967 that got approved - or '65 I think by the Park and it was the first time they had ever been asked to approve a Master Plan - and when he was back here in 1995 he wanted to see this Company's Master Plan and compare it with his. It took us a while to find it and we did. But he said "that's our Master Plan" and it was as good if not better than others had done. There was a bit up on Meritt's Spur but there wasn't much else.

We didn't have any accommodation on that side of the river but yes, we had tennis courts all over the village on the steep slopes and that was impossible because the architect was a bit of a dill. But it was approved and it served the purpose.

*You are talking about the new plan or the old one?*

No, the old one.

*You mean the architect was the dreamer of the old one?*

Yes, John James yes. He subdivided it in such a difficult way. As a practical engineer, I said "John you can't do that. Look at this site here, it's got electricity cables, no access, you know. So he said "In that case I'll take the lease." So that is what happened.

*You mean that back in 1965 when Happy Jacks was built, John James was lessee.*

And he straight away sub leased it. Right. It was not done in those days. He was lucky to get away with it.

*It was one of the few in the village.*

The first one.

*Getting back to the Master Plan, how do you think it compares the original one compared to the one in place now?*

Dusseldorp thought it was the same. But what else could you do? This side of the slope of the valley is for buildings, the other side is for skiing. So you can have a few variations by having a few lodges that side - ski in ski out stuff. We hadn't thought of that, perhaps we should have. It was a bit stupid to think of lodges on Meritt's Spur. We had a little railway going up there where the Gunbarrel Lift is now. We had never thought of Friday Flat as a skier area, beginner

area, because we didn't know anything about snow making and nobody else did. It was in its infancy. They were snow making over in the United States where the temperatures were very much colder than they are here. So that came twenty years later.

*So to round off our talk, I take it that what your impression now is that what they have done today with the new technology, the snow making, the slopes management compared to when you were in your role as manager, virtually it has progressed quite a bit.*

Oh yes. Definitely. One thing thought which we didn't have on our Master Plan was the lake. Tony Sponar reminded me. He disagreed with Crackenback Chairlift finishing where it is now. He wanted it to finish up where the Community Centre is, because it is the fall line from the top. The lifts have to go where the fall line is. He wasn't quite right there because we have learnt to ski away from the lines. His colleagues in the old company, who were Geoffrey Hughes, Thyne Reid – I don't think so – he was purely a financier – but the skiers were – mainly Hughes perhaps and Tony Sponar never really got on with him - Charles Anton maybe who was the only other skier, other than Tony, they said "Well look, our profits will come from the hotel – beer sales – they didn't see the profit coming from skiing". So they said "We can't put a hotel there, it is too cramped." But they said "The bottom of the chairlift must not be too far from the hotel."

So the bottom of the chairlift played second role and finished up dictated by the position of the hotel. That is something Tony Sponar would have never agreed to. I mentioned that to Dusseldorp when he was here in 1995 and we drove around there and he was speechless. When he unveiled the sculpture he mentioned that Tony Sponar was right. Tony wasn't here at the time, he was in Czechoslovakia, but the snow making has caught up with that, because before the snow making, the Milk Run was there and it has sun first thing in the morning.

Friday Flat is something I wouldn't have dared to do. I left during the winter of 1985 – Wayne Kirkpatrick's first – he got a Canadian company involved to advise on snowmaking here. The Canadian company had just done a lot of snowmaking near Calgary where they had the Olympics – or was it a World Cup or was it both?

*I think it was the Olympics.*

Around that time and they had done a lot of snowmaking there. But Wayne being a marketer, he didn't read the technical aspect and they didn't have any records of temperatures. And they were not the same as those in Canada. So it was an enormous gamble. I wouldn't have dared take that decision. But Wayne was lucky. Since then it has improved because technological advances. In those days, you'd put a finger up in the air and say "It's cold enough to make snow."

*Now it is automatic.*

It is all automatic and there are 120 guns I believe. We became experts in snow fences and they still do that. They were a great success because you could put them wherever and then bulldoze snow all over the place. We had three snow vehicles and now they have seven. You can see the results of that. In that respect, the company has really progressed far.

If I look back at what we did in '84, '85 the basics were there. Our company said "Look the basics are there. We are the developers, we have done that." It has now become a success

because of marketing. Then they said “we want to sell because this is not in line anymore with development.”

So I found out later that they approached Rydges “Would you like to buy it?” In my speech at the Anniversary, because I read the book which had just been written “50 Years of Thredbo”. So they approached Alan Rydge and Alan Rydge spoke after me, and he said “You’re right, Albert, they did.” So he said to Wayne Kirkpatrick “Show me around.” He wasn’t a very good skier. They went up to the top station and Rydge said “Where’s the snow?”

*Considering that Rydge isn’t as hands on as Dusseldorp was, the way Thredbo has progressed actually in line with the dream of an international resort.*

I remember, when I spoke to him, I said “How is it that” – I was placed right next to Dusseldorp at the dinner – I said Alan knows exactly what is happening and all that. Being in the know is one thing, but does he contribute?

*I see*

But that was his question. So he believed that a boss, no matter how high he is, has to contribute.

*That is an interesting observation.*

Yes, very, very interesting observation. He was a very creative man. Now he had his weaknesses, like selecting people was not his strongest point. But he knew when creativity was, and he knew that when had to select. I believe that for many years he had an offsider who was an expert in that. There is a book written recently about him which was started when he was still alive. They interviewed me and lots of other people. The book is called “Finding a Common Interest” and I am trying to get a copy for the Historical Society. Frank told me you have got a copy in the library but it is registered and it’s got to stay there, but you can’t give a copy and say “Make sure you bring it back.” So I asked for two copies – one for the Society to keep as a reference – because everything there is spot on.

It’s not all about Thredbo – but also its about the type person he was, as a business man and as a leader, a motivator and all that. Mainly because of the ideas he had, he had them for a long time, and he checked them out. Once the time was ready then it took off. And that worked in many, many ways. So the other book I will give to Frank and he can sort of keep an eye it and lend it out, and I will ask for another two books.

I had a book and it was signed by the writer but I gave it to my grandson in Canada because he was an up and coming student in management. It turned out he wasn’t doing management – he is going for his PhD in Economics – agricultural economics which do not necessarily make a manager. But he is absolutely surprised by what he read, it is easy to read, because in Canada and especially in America, this doesn’t exist. It’s too capitalistic and in Europe it is too socialistic and Dusseldorp was both.

*I think this is a good time at which to end our discussion. Thank you very much and on behalf of the Society we would certainly like to have a copy in the Museum. Thank you for your time Albert, it was a pleasure to talk to you.*

As I say.....no worries  
*Thank you very much*

**SPEECH BY ALBERT VAN DER LEE,**  
Thredbo's Golden Ball, Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2007

***THREDBO UNDER LEND LEASE 1961 to 1987.***

I find it extremely difficult to cover 26 of the most formative years of Thredbo in 15 minutes, so I may go over that limit a little and I hope you will understand.

I was working as a young civil engineer for Civil and Civic at the Opera House in winter 1961, when I learned that Lend Lease had taken over the company operating the Thredbo Alpine Resort.

In 1962 preparations were underway by Civil and Civic for a major construction program at Thredbo. The proposed works consisted mainly infrastructure, water and sewer reticulation, a sewage treatment plant, roads, hotel, trail clearing and ski lifts.

Myself, and others of the Opera House crew, were transferred to Thredbo to head up the construction team for the '62-'63 summer season. I had also been in Thredbo for a few weeks in August - September to carry out some surveying for the design of new roads.

So, in October 1962 I came to live in the village with my family.

***Dick Dusseldorp.***

Civil and Civic at the time was doing most of its projects as a 'design and construct' package. The person with overall responsibility for liaison with the client, coordinating design and construction was the Project Manager. The Project Manager for Thredbo was no one less than the Founder and Chairman of Lend Lease, Mr G J or Dick Dusseldorp. He had placed himself in that position from the start of the KT take-over and remained so for many years to come.

It was a personal challenge to him to control the development of Thredbo in the short term, in order to give it a chance for success in the long term.

***Head Lease and Subleases.***

Dusseldorp thought that the lease, which the government had granted to Kosciuszko Thredbo Limited in November 57, was a very favourable one, because it was very long term [50 years with a 50 year option] and it covered mountain as well as village, provided that it was financed in a proper way. Many years later when there was some criticism voiced about it being a lease, which was too much 'the company's way', I recall he remarked: "there weren't that many Lend Leases around at the time".

***Development 1962 -63.***

A few weeks after my arrival in Thredbo, I was asked by Dusseldorp to remain as Resident Engineer of KT. I accepted and so became the first "newcomer" to join the old KT staff. My transfer from C&C to KT gave me an entirely different set of responsibilities. To name only some:

- sublease boundaries
- signposting
- traffic and parking
- liaison with the Monaro County Council who were about to put
- Thredbo on the electricity grid
- the Snowy Mountains Authority

- and the Snowy River Shire Council about the Alpine Way, water quality and sewage effluent
- the Park Trust of course about building approvals, a joint building code, and fire protection.
- It even included the CSIRO about bush fly control.

### ***Winter 1963.***

I think it was about March or April 63, when Dusseldorp put his mind more to operations and he asked me to become the Company's Resident Manager. Again I accepted, as I had become to realise what a beautiful community we had here and how interesting this job would be.

Dusseldorp had an Austrian ski instructor by the name of Willy Falger on hold for the job of Mountain Manager in winter, but he selected Cees Koeman in that position all year round.

Leonhard Erharter, was Chief Instructor at Thredbo, I think from 1958, and continued as Ski School Director. Ann Koeman, Dennis Nutt, Shirley Middleton, Stan Moucka, Ludwig and Brigitte Rabina, all continued on the staff of KT.

From this core we recruited a team of dedicated and enthusiastic young people to run the mountain, the village and the office.

On completion of stage two of the hotel, which included the dining room, bistro, kitchen and schuss bar, the hotel was subleased to Mascot Industries and was named the Coach House Inn. Ernst Forras, well known identity from Mt Buller, was the hotel manager that winter of 1963.

From the beginning, Dusseldorp had laid down very clear management principles and strategies, which had already proven their worth with the successes of Lend Lease. These became known later as the Lend Lease Culture and I think it is appropriate to list a few here.

### ***Management principles:***

- Management is a profession that can be learnt.
- Management is teamwork
- Profit is essential but not the end objective of business.
- People are our biggest asset.
- We aim for our employees to achieve their optimum personal development.
- Safety is a priority of the highest order and also has commercial benefits.
- In dealings with other parties we always look for a common interest.
- Our business is to benefit all our stakeholders, not only shareholders, but also employees, customers and suppliers.
- All authorities are important.
- We obey the laws of the land and stick to our agreements.
- We aim to be a good corporate citizen.
- Integrity is not negotiable.

### **I will also list some strategies set down for Thredbo:**

#### **On development:**

A Master Plan was to form the base for all future development. Great care was taken to make this plan. Dusseldorp took personal control of it for some four years.

**On uphill transport:**

Safety always has an overriding priority. Operating and maintenance manuals were drawn up, dividing responsibilities by which the maintenance manager and the operations manager each had authority to stop a lift, but they needed each other's approval to start it.

**On ski racing:**

Quoting Dusseldorp: "Thredbo has longer and more challenging ski runs than other ski areas. This is an asset, which can be promoted nationally, even internationally, by supporting ski racing". As a result, the Thredbo Cup was inaugurated in 1963.

All advertising on the mountain was banned. No more 'coca cola' slalom flags for instance. This was done to stop 'visual pollution', as well as build value for the future.

**On ski school:**

The same rationale was applied: challenging slopes will tend to attract the more advanced skiers. Our ski instructors needed to be of the highest standard. This strategy was already established by the previous Company and supported by the activities of the Ski Club of Australia. Leonhard Erharder needed no encouragement to continue setting the bar high, and many would agree today that he significantly contributed to the high standards of skiing seen here in the sixties and seventies.

Talking about Leonhard:

He was a real disciplinarian and ran a tight ship. The Austrians knew that there was no point in speaking up against him, but a rookie New Zealander, Morris Flutey, was not used to this. One morning he turned up at the meeting place when Leonhard pointed a ski stick at him and called: "Morris, you're late". Morris looked at his watch and replied: "it is 5 to 9 on my watch". Leonhard: "wrong watch!"

Morris: "I set my watch this morning to my radio!"

Leonhard: "wrong radio!"

**On ski patrol:**

A purely voluntary system prior to 63, but our strategy was clear: the Company must have sole control of all services on the mountain. We took some time to get it right, but within a few years a structure was in place, which, I think, has performed to the satisfaction of all concerned and became the model of other ski areas. A good example of the common interest principle!

**On summer operations:**

Dusseldorp: "In the long term summer may overtake winter. In a way winter will look after itself, but the real challenge is to make this a very successful resort in the summer seasons. There is much we have that others cannot match". The main feature of course was our topography and the chairlift that went somewhere. We ran it consistently every day just to make a point that we were open for business all year round.

**On retailing and business promotions:**

We followed the successfully established principles Lend Lease used in operating regional shopping centres.

- Retailing is left to specialists.
- We issue short and long-term leases and rentals are linked to turnover.
- We will take the initiative in promotional activities, and all commercial operators will be our partners in this activity.

The major retailers who came on board in '63 were:

- Mascot Industries operating the hotel.
- Fleets Flyers for the Ski Hire.
- Later to be followed by Rudi Schaetzli. Rudi and Chris took on mountain catering after Rudi had been busy for several summers clearing just about every square meter of ski trails on the mountain. When he first applied for a catering franchise, Dusseldorp considered Rudi's experience. Catering was not included, but his attributes were well known, so Duss said: "well there are not that many Rudi's about, so let's give him a go!" And here he is, still today, having operated business in Thredbo for nearly all of the 50 years we are celebrating tonight.

### ***The later sixties.***

Several projects of the master plan became a reality later in the sixties. Stage three of the hotel was completed in 67.

It had become clear that the hotel was such an integral part of the resort's operations that subleasing it was no longer an option. Mascot Industries surrendered their lease and the Coach House Inn became the Thredbo Alpine Hotel, as we know it today.

Merritt's Spur was opened for the '68 winter season. The village roads were re-aligned, the Eastern Subdivision was on its way. Duncan Horne, the architect of the hotel extensions became the Company's consulting architect.

Good snow seasons alternated with bad ones. We learned from our mistakes as well as from advice given by others and especially from observations made by visiting ski areas in Europe and the US, where snow grooming and snow making were starting to become of increasing importance to ski area management.

In Thredbo we had a major change in that we now were operating the hotel. Eric Goetz had been recruited from the Zürserhof in the Arlberg, Austria, to run the new Alpine Hotel in 1967. Eric left a year later and was succeeded by Harold Droga, who asserted his standards of hotel management until he was head hunted by Kerry Packer in 1973.

Talking about the hotel: at some stage Doug Edwards was Head Waiter in the dining room. Dougie, as he was affectionately known, was always looking for an opportunity to have some creative fun. So on this occasion a customer complained that the smoked trout she had been served was not smoked enough. Dougie apologised and took her plate away to return a minute or two later presenting the trout with a partly smoked cigar in its mouth. "You asked for your trout to be more smoked madam?"

I should add that Dougie knew this customer very well but the people at nearby tables were, of course, unaware of that.

From 1968, Dusseldorp's interests for Lend Lease were increasingly focused on North America. He kept a seat on the board of KT, but delegated the running of the Company to others. Michael Matthews became CEO with John Hagley as Marketing Manager. I was appointed a director of KT in August 1970.

### ***The seventies.***



Earlier in the seventies development centred on summer facilities. The golf course became a reality, also a bowling green, tennis courts and a network of walks on the mountain. The first holiday apartments were built, also several staff quarters.

A most significant achievement of Michael Matthews was an alteration to the Head Lease with the creation of a new type of sublease, the Holiday Apartment Lease. This was negotiated with Tom Lewis, then minister for Lands and creator of the National Parks and Wildlife Service in 67.

Indeed, where would Thredbo Village be today without that amendment to the Head Lease?

In marketing, the focus was on sales. An accommodation booking centre was established in Sydney. Package deals were marketed including lifts, lessons, ski hire, accommodation and meals in the commercial lodges and the hotel, and some with transport to and from the resort by plane, coach or train. The advertisements of the Thredbo Express won a prestigious advertising award. These were weekend packages by chartered train from Sydney to Cooma with dining, live music and bar service on board.

Peter Castle contributed much to the sales results in that period.

Later in the seventies more lifts were built: Anton's, Sponar's and Karel's T-bars, the top of which is near a corner of the Head Lease at 2037 metre elevation, and that became Australia's highest lifted point. The Central Spur with High Noon was opened and in 1980 the Snowgums Chairlift increased the lifting capacity from the village with access to the T Bars at Central Spur.

### ***The eighties.***

In the early eighties KT joined some other Lend Lease companies, Lend Lease Homes, Waitara Retirement Village and Country Comfort Motels, to form a new subsidiary company, Lend Lease Leisure, with John Hagley as CEO.

I became a director of that company in February 1982.

Focus had changed from development to marketing.

Wayne Kirkpatrick was Marketing Manager and on my retirement in 1984 he took over from me as Area Manager of Thredbo.

So, this next bit I have taken from Jim Darby's book, which incidentally, I think is an excellent and objective reference to Thredbo's 50 years history.

In 1986 KT engaged prominent ski area consultants from North America to develop a ski fields plan, which called for more summer slope grooming, a base area at Friday Flat, increased lift capacity and snow making, so extensive, it had never been done before on such a scale in Australia. All this was adding up to an additional investment of some 40-60 million dollars.

When the plan was presented to the Lend Lease Board they had apparently already decided to sell the resort.

Dusseldorp wanted input into who the new owners were going to be.

Amalgamated Holdings Limited was approached and ultimately Alan Rydge and his board took over the Thredbo Lease in January 1987.

I am pleased to see Kim Clifford at the helm today. He started as a management trainee with me some 32 years ago. Many of those years were in the Lend Lease era. So, I would like to think that the Lend Lease Culture has had some lasting effect on KT's management and, in his case, add passion, loyalty and commitment to this place we call Thredbo Village.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who were part of the team during my time as Resident Manager of Thredbo. The list is too long to mention all, but just to name a few:

John Olsen, Jann Mattick, Kim Clifford, Errol Hanlon, Doug Edwards, Wayne and Carol Stinson, Poss Simpson along with many others having a long association with Thredbo, and who are here tonight. Ann and Cees Koeman holding the record of longest residents, I believe at 46 years, next in line Heinz and Michelle Reichinger, and the oldest resident, at 85, but still an active international skier, my good friend Frank Prihoda.

Others have moved on to different places or retirement: Peter Wright, Ludwig Rabina, Brigitte Rabina, Fred Trawager, Fred Nijsten, Jim Chapel, Andy Griffith, Ron Finneran, Darryl Drayton, Derek Browse.

And sadly some have passed away: Corn Klunder, Michael Matthews Arnold Konrad and more recently Leonhard Erharter.

I would also like to thank all lodge-owners, retailers and others who contributed to make my time at Thredbo, such a rewarding period for me.

Karel and Sasha Nekvapil, Tony and Lisi Sponar, with whom I became close friends, Kornel and Susanne Deseo, John and Pam Hughes, Michael and Dawn Lucas, Vic and Beryl Clifford, Bela and Gaby Racsko, Dave Rowley, who all became solid supporters, Bernt and Tricia Hecher whom I joined in partnership after I left Lend Lease. Elyne Mitchell, Bob Arnott, David Epstein, Kurt Lance, Ivo Deubler, Adrian Studley, Ivo Deubler, George Freuden, where do I go from here?

The Snowy Mountains Regional Tourist Association, the Isolated Children's Parents Association, the Thredbo Ski Racing Club, the Thredbo Resort Association, the Australian Ski Areas Association, the Disabled Skiers Association, and, post Lend Lease, the Thredbo Historical Society, all made my long years at Thredbo most rewarding.

I thank you for your attention and wish you a very pleasant continuation of this evening.

**ALBERT VAN DER LEE**

*This is Katrina Cruz interviewing Albert van der Lee at Thredbo on 28<sup>th</sup>, August 1995 concerning the Thredbo Village heritage conservation. Albert, would you please give me your full name.*

Albert van der Lee

*And would you tell me when and where you were born.*

16th December 1935 in Drunen in the south of the Netherlands.

*Can we start off by telling me how you came to this part of Australia and got involved in the Australian Alps?*

I finished my engineering education in Holland in Civil Engineering and came to Australia in 1960 where I found a job with Lend Lease as a Site Engineer of part of the Sydney Opera House - Stage One Construction between 1960 and 62.

In 1962, Lend Lease had just the previous year taken over the head lease of Kosciusko Thredbo Propriety Limited of the Thredbo Alpine Resort in the Kosciusko National Park in the Snowy Mountains and had just embarked on quite an extensive program of redevelopment, extending the facilities there. Our job had finished in Sydney and quite a few of us were transferred and volunteered to come to the Snowy Mountains.

So I came here in October 62, I was Site Engineer for a few months and then I was asked to carry on and stay here as a Resident Engineer. Subsequently, I took over the management of the resort as well and I have been involved with the development, the planning and the operations of the place from 1962 through to 1984 when I retired from that job.

*And you've certainly seen a lot of the development and seen and been involved with the people who made it happen over those years.*

I certainly have, yeah from 1962, 63 onwards.

*When you came in 1962, what was the valley, the village looking like then? How many lodges just generally?*

There were approximately 70 lodges. There were vacant sites. There was a subdivision sort of done. There were roads. There was water. But it was really pretty primitive. There was no electricity at first from the grid and there was sewage only by septic tanks. There were a few roads made with rocks and awkward to turn around in. So we really had to do a new layout using the existing situation as a base. By doing that, we also extended the infrastructure so we could also extend the subdivision and create new property subdivided land.

*Do you know who would have been responsible for the existing layout that you saw there?*

Well the way I understand it, it grew a little bit sort of higgledy-piggledy, by accident rather than by design, I think. The people who came here in 1958 would know better than that, but the man who started Thredbo and was its first Area Manager, Tony Sponar, happens to be a good friend of mine now and we often talked about it a lot. Tony Sponar said he was given, by the first syndicate members, a budget of 4000 pounds in 1957 to build a road from the Alpine Way to what was then called "The Hotel" site which subsequently was called, became known as, "The Lodge", which was the first hotel and consisted of two Snowy Mountains barracks. I think he was given \$1000 extra to build The Lodge.

Now, this road which was virtually dictated by I think the geography, of this particular hotel site and its connection with the main road in. I think that four lodges sort of appeared on both sides of it, resulted in the hairpin bend in from the higher Alpine Way to the lower side of the hotel which was near to the river.

All the lodges now and then are opposite the ski slopes which means that they are all facing north and therefore are sunny which is easy for building and very easy of course for winter operation when there's snow. Because you had the snow on the shady side of the valley and you had the sun where the roads are, on the sunny side. There again, that was more I think a bit of bonus obviously made by Sponar and Co.

*Did they recognise the natural characteristics that could be?*

Oh very much so. The mountain dictated the village. It has always been until perhaps the last few years. Sponar first, therefore, selected the site for a chairlift because that would provide for the best skiing. And that's important for skiing. You've got to have a bottom spot where you can easily get on a lift and you've got to have a top spot where you can easily get away from the chairlift. And of course, you've got to have, in between, the reasonable slopes that people can handle; not too easy or too hard and so on.

The purpose of Thredbo at the time was to find more challenging ski slopes than were available at Kosciusko Chalet which was the nearest resort from here. At the Kosciusko Chalet, a lot of people got together saying "We need something more than this" so Sponar and a few others soon asked them, "Well where?" And they began to look for a place which they knew would be suitable skiing wise. Having done that, that particular bottom Sponar had in mind is now where the new subdivision Crackenback Ridge is, because it was more in a direct fall line from the top of the mountain.

The current chairlift line sort of leans away from the fall line at the lower section, exposing it towards the sun, the morning sun, but that's irrelevant now because of snowmaking. That wouldn't have been irrelevant then, but it was to the snowmaking team in 1987-88. So Sponar's proposed trail was more in the shadow, more of a natural sort of skiing route and therefore he proposed the village should be there at the bottom because people want to walk to the lift. Sponar was overruled by a few, and a little while later by the other syndicate members who said that from the village point of view that it was not as good as where it now is, so they shifted the site and therefore shifted the lift line.

In other words the geography for the town started to drive the siting of facilities on the mountain which he never believed was right because he had determined the ski area, the skiing should take priority and should drive the rest. Of course, he was right in that philosophy because for a while this mountain suffered enormously from lack of snow at the bottom and that became a real big handicap compared to other resorts where people could always drive with their car to the car-park and be on the snow immediately. This was not so with Thredbo and until snowmaking came, it brought a real problem.

The village, in Sponar's concept, would've been therefore on the side of the golf course, and it would've been on the same side of the mountain as the ski area, the slope side. They wouldn't have the benefit there of the sun on the roads and so on because of that part of valley is far steeper. So it was a trade off.

*So the members of the syndicate were all debating*

They were, yes. Now as far as the village is concerned, he told me and reminded me again last time I spoke to him which was only 3 weeks ago before he went to Europe. Knowing that this weekend was going to come up, I sort of wanted to have a few things of the older days straight in my head again when these things happened. It's all going to be covered in his book that's going to come out and that will be in 2 weeks time for that and I couldn't guarantee you if somebody can prove that not historical. I'm sure he will recall the whole lot and start again. That's how fussy he is about his facts being right.

*Can you tell me the name of that book?*

It's called "Snow in Australia? That's News to Me"

*And it's been published?*

And then, yes, it will have a front cover which is similar to our winter brochure with the skier looking down at the village from the top. Now he took a picture from that very same spot on the 5th September 1955. When he saw that brochure it reminded him of that picture, which he got out. That is our first anniversary event of our 40th anniversary at Thredbo. We will have a function with the Historical Society.

*Just by the way, do you know who the publisher is of that book?*

Tabletop Publishers, I think it's called, Klaus Hueneke in Canberra. It's being printed now to be launched on 16<sup>th</sup> December in Thredbo. He's having a pre-launch arranged in the Czech Republic at the moment to his friends there and he's having a professional translator translate into Czech as well because of his Czech heritage.

Now, the type of village he had in mind was simple in his mind. He had spent from 1941 or so to 1948, nearly 6-7 years nearly full time in St Anton as a young ski teacher and ski racer later.

*In Austria?*

In Austria. St Anton at the time would have been one of the two or three places in Europe which would have been world class and good quality facilities, and still is, but now there are more. There wouldn't have been a place in Austria for instance that would've been, could claim that it would be more unique than St Anton by international standards. So Tony Sponar modelled himself to the atmosphere of St Anton thinking "this is the sort of village which I have in mind."

He told me then a few weeks ago that there were only 4 or 5 people who understood that and that was Karel and Sasha Nekvapil who came with him to Australia. Sasha was racing at the same time in the National team in Czechoslovakia. She was sister to Frank Prihoda who's here in the gift shop. Frank was also a ski racer but not in 1948.

As far as the members of the syndicate were concerned, he thought there was only really one man who really understood that concept as well and that was Charles Anton because I guess Charles Anton and Tony Sponar were the only Europeans in that syndicate and none of the other syndicate members were really, hadn't been overseas to get the feeling of the ski resorts there. There were people who had like Bob Arnott and Tom Mitchell and Elyne Mitchell but they were not involved with Thredbo Syndicate. So it was a model centred on, not

so much in architecture but in atmosphere, Now you can't get an atmosphere without the architecture and the layout and the plan of course so it grew around that road and they said "Oh well, we'll see what happens".

In 1957 the first buildings were built - The Lodge - which was the company hotel building and the first ski club next to it called Crackenback Ski Club. So those two buildings were going to be the core, the centre of the village. Mind you excavating vehicles were out in those days. The only excavation was to be done by hand - like trenches for foundations and for services. The road was bulldozed but nothing else was. And that was banned later by the Park too because of conservation. Now of course it is different, but it wasn't like that then. So in 57 the first two buildings were built.

In 1958 other people came to the village and started building all the lodges and that was when Bela Racsko and Steve Szeloczky were the builders. Soon the buildings spread out. From there Bela carried on without Steve Szeloczky who started Lantern Lodge. There were other people like Deseo and Bill Bursill, an Australian and several ski clubs.

The people you met this weekend came also in that year and started building. So they were the first Europeans. All the Europeans came into village and started to do the first building in 1958 and 1959 if I've got my facts right which the book will correct me if I'm wrong. But by the architecture of those days the style of building was set. The stonework at the bottom, the upper storeys were hardwood.

Smaller buildings were built by individuals and became private lodges - they were built then, but were later banned. A few commercial lodges came alive in 1958. Sasha's Lodge and Candlelight. And that's how it started.

*Can I get you to think about the allotments? I understand there was the centre of the village and then how were the allotments worked out?*

I think a surveying firm was called in. I think it was Wallace and Tiernan to peg out a subdivision plan with allotments and their boundaries. The plan was certainly there when I came here in '63. We modified and completed it even for all the existing lots. But I think in the very first years or maybe 2 years the buildings simply went up and they put the boundaries in between the buildings. And there were a few, sort of difficult times to sort that out. My first job as local engineer was to sort that very problem out.

*Buildings were placed in spots that weren't suitable for the general development?*

No. Buildings were put in spots which they thought "Well, this is a nice spot to put a building" but didn't have any regard to lines on paper. The lines on paper came after the building in the beginning. After that things turned around, but in between we sorted it out by saying "Look that boundary should be sort of there, there's a creek there and there's a building there so let's put the boundaries this way" and there were no other limitations or need to negotiate between people. We have A, often sitting between A and B and saying "Oh I want my boundary there" and ok we give a bit there and take a bit there. And this was the process. It took about 2 years to do.

Now when Lend Lease took over in November 1961 there were no contracts with people who had established the buildings. There would've been about 50 to 60 buildings already there, all built between 1957 and 1961. So when I came in 1962 there were about 70 and there were about 4 or 5 under construction. So it all happened very, very fast. You know, that's 20 buildings a year almost, in 3 years, 4 year's time. Now there were no subleases.

These people had no documents to give them the right to be there. The State Government, it was then called the State Park Trust, had issued a document first, a temporary one or draft one to the Kosciusko Thredbo Company to operate the whole place and they had the right to subdivide and so on.

But the Company wasn't ready yet to issue subleases to individuals. They were in the process of doing the boundaries when I came here, and Dusseldorp after Lend Lease took over. I wasn't there but I know that Thredbo had plenty of history about that, a meeting was called of all the sublessees who were given the option to have this sublease that was offered by the company. So then that was tidied up soon after Lend Lease took over between November 1961 and October 1962, and I think it was done. But not all of them were signed and they were all waiting for these boundaries to be sorted and that's when I came.

*Were the boundaries also influenced by some areas which were a bit swampy?*

Oh definitely. Oh yes, swampy land was out. Nobody dared because how could you dig a trench by hand with the condition in there?

*So it's very much the natural environment was.*

Very much and the first, the best sites went first. And that's how it grew, not because there was a Master Plan but because that seems to be a nice knoll or dry area with not too many boulders in it. The buildings were small and light, you know there was only a bit of stone at the bottom and then concrete blocks braced by stone. And timber construction of few storeys above that and none of them were very big buildings.

There were two exceptions. The bigger ones were wooden barracks which were bought from the Snowy Mountains sub-contractors at Guthega which finished the Guthega Dam project and the Snowy Mountains Authority was left with all these prefabricated huts which were used extensively all over the Snowy Mountains Scheme construction sites and even in Cooma for the work of the Snowy Mountains Scheme.

*And Ramshead is the survivor?*

The Ski Club of Australia - I think it's the only one now, isn't it? There were about 4 or 5

*Talking now about the, once the pattern was set and then the architects started to come in and design things to fit in with the landscape, were there some architects that had a particularly strong influence?*

I don't think there were. I've never heard anybody say in 62 or afterwards a particular architect had a strong influence. I don't think so. If there was any, it must have been Bela Rascko because he designed and built three quarters of the buildings between 60, between 58 and 62. And after that again. I think it was in an article in 1964 by the National Trust. It stated that there were 3 or 4 significant type of styles of architecture in the village but I've never seen those, I can't see them. But what I can see is 3 or 4 different types of construction, of design, not of style that are Bela Rascko's design which was with a lower level of concrete blocks, partly set in the bank, caused by the site and two stories with timber on top of that, a very simple construction.

The alpine colour scheme at the time was conservative, no more paints like there are now so they always had to be a mission brown in colour, all the timber and stone up there and that was it. Simple driveways in and out. No machines - all handwork therefore light. No cranes, no nothing. So it was a lightweight construction type era. Most of those buildings have now been recycled. Not all of them but quite a few of them.

Then the second wave came in when Lend Lease came in and built the Hotel, what we now call the Hotel. The first stage of that still a lightweight construction, mainly timber with very little concrete and stone. Stone was only there for architectural style purposes, concrete for special purposes but structurally there was mainly timber. But they became higher and bigger and a bit more solid and then of course in the last 10 years or so the modern technique you can now use machines again for excavation. You can excavate a lot more. The retainer walls can be heavier and bigger and there's cranes on the sites. There's ready mix concrete. There's a lot, and then of course the fire zoning would change to what there is now. So timber virtually disappeared and that's what I see as in the different styles of design. So now anything can be designed and built and you see now buildings which are very similar to other holiday areas, whether they're alpine or not.

*And the development in technology grew?*

Sure, look at the building of the Thredbo Alpine Hotel which was all mission brown, alpine ash, hardwood - the last building I think it was used in and with acorn oil finish. There was only one firm in Sydney that made that sort of oil and it was done and every two years at least it had to be redone with the same oil, bit more where the sun hit it most and then in the shadow areas but it was good for preservation. There was nothing wrong with it but it was boring in colour. They were always dark brown in timber colours with perhaps black or white trimmings and that was it. And a galvanised roof, galvanised steel roof. But now you can see this whole building is now sort of greenish-grey and they've certainly put modern paint on. Then they couldn't put paint on oil because the timber doesn't absorb the oil in the paint or the water in the paint, but now with modern technology they can.

*Do you know where the timber came from for most of the early buildings? Was it local timber?*

Yes. Oh yeah, definitely. There were timber yards in the area - Nimmitabel, Adaminaby, Cooma where the hardwood structural timber came from and the hardwood particle timber. Outside usually alpine ash and then inside very often radiata pine because it is softer, easy, cheaper you know - a lot cheaper. Rascko and Co soon found out that the local hardwood wasn't really suitable for structural use because it was never weathered enough. In the beginning it might have been but not after more was required. If it wasn't heavily weathered it was still moving. So it started, it continued to warp and move and shrink. It caused all sorts of problems you know, with the structure and ceiling and edges and so on. So when I was here from then onwards, oregon was used (structural) because it was soft wood. This was before my time so that's what they did. But now after that it was all oregon. It doesn't move.

*Where did that come from?*

From America. And the cladding timber. Now since The Hotel was built in 67, it's all been cedar outside, everywhere and that comes from California and Canada.



*Tell me the story about the galvanised rooves and the stream.*

Ah yes, in 1963 we constructed - the construction season here - and we had an old fashioned Dutch foreman who specialised in setting up concrete mixing plants. There was no ready mix concrete and he needed gravel. It was needed also for pathways. He looked at the river and he saw that at Friday Flat there was a quarry area where the Snowy Mountains Authority had extensively quarried gravel near the river, next to, diverted the river again, for all sorts of road extension work on the Alpine Way. It looked like a gravel quarry so he put the bulldozer in there and started to stockpile some gravel. Then we got a phone call from the Trout Hatchery some 20-30 kilometres downstream. The person said "What are you doing? You know all our little fingerlings are dying because the water turned muddy in our tanks, in our breeding tanks for the fish which water gets there out of it".

Okay so we went over there as they suggested we should do and were shown what their problem was with the breeding of these trout, which is a breeding process from eggs to fingerlings which you know delicate of course. Most trout farms now start with the fingerlings but that one starts from the eggs. It is a hatchery, not just a farm. And this was very, very important. A little bit of mud in the water can sort of kill half a year's harvest for them in a few hours.

Well, while I was talking to the hatchery, the manager there said "We have another problem. We think that the roof runoff at Thredbo upstream from here is causing the zinc level in the water to rise and that is found to be a real problem for our breeding program. If that continues to rise like this, we will be out of business because we can't sift it out". He thought it was roof runoff and could well be but as explained to, we haven't heard of that problem since, so it obviously has stopped or gone less because it doesn't bother them anymore. You know Andrew Cox says it is probably because the zinc process these days are much, more different than those days. They are better. They use less zinc because they have a better manufacturing process and there would be no other reason because all the roofing materials are still galvanised.

*It's an interesting story. I like that. Let me get you to think about Thredbo and its relationship with the other snow villages, ski villages in the area. Do you think that people had a vision it would be something special that was different from the other villages as a result of its natural terrain?*

Absolutely. As a result of the natural terrain, Thredbo by its nature had, became compact village. The buildings are reasonably close together because it was too steep to build a road so they clustered around that road and the same with other roads there now, and the steep valley, close to lifts. So there was no other way. It had to be compact which became an advantage for services there.

Now compare that with Perisher and the buildings there in a wide open valley with long views, easy to drive from one spot to another because it's really flat. The Park Service wanted them to blend in. "We don't like this." Every building had to blend in with the landscape so buildings were almost hidden and far apart which became a problem of course to serve the village later as they were well aware. But from a people point of view, because the compactness it became cosier and especially in the summer when the mountain is as important as the village is, compared to winter. So that's because of its nature. There is no other village in Australia that I know of that is so compact in the Alps than this one.

*And do you think that attracted certain types of people to build lodges here or just the skiers themselves?*

It's the building we sell because as I said the first wave of people came here building lodges. Susanne Deseo reminded me this morning that "We didn't have any money and our friends thought we were crazy going to Thredbo to put all our savings which we brought from Europe in 1948 as refugees to this country and who would know whether this thing would work or not when we were the first investors." The area they came from, and they weren't quite happy with their environment in Sydney.

There was a very ethnic people in 1958 that was different to now. So they thought that here by building something European in that style and you know of course the others were here already. Bela Rascko, was also Hungarian. They felt more at home and therefore all those European people from 1957 to 1960 had that sense of belonging in mind when they came here. Certainly there were 60 buildings in 3 years.

That didn't happen at Perisher. There were very few continental people there because it didn't have that atmosphere, and here it did. There was a bit of this and a little bit of that there was no boom there like it was here. So the fact that there was a boom and that the first wave of those people were continental obviously proved the fact that yes they created that atmosphere, that looks, of Alpine look of the buildings and the type of, cosiness of the village was very, very important, instrumental of making the place happen.

*Do you think that characteristic still survives today or it's been diminished by the locals/Australians?*

It's diminished but it still survives but it's diminished because now the ethnics would be in the minority here whereas then they were in the majority. But it was a gradual process so it didn't sort of change suddenly. We saw in the 1963, to say 1970 period, the buildings and that were much more unique in Australian Alpine rather than Continental Alpine. Harry Seidler with his lodge for instance, was probably the first prominent Australian architect building something on purpose here rather than just a club house for a few dollars or something like other architects may have done. But he was sent here and asked and commissioned to do something special.

After that the Thredbo Alpine Hotel in 1967 with its new wing constructed. That doesn't look European. That looks typically Australian Alpine so that style came into then, that was totally influenced by Australian architects some with a continental background like Seidler but not necessarily with an Alpine background. Seidler was a Viennese from the city. He may have been a skier but I don't think he was. I've never seen him ski. So that was different. Still with a continental flavour in it but not necessarily with an Alpine chalet of Europe or as you see elsewhere that sort of style. The Australian Alpine style was unique.

*You mentioned Friday Flat before. Let's take you back there again. Was that only a quarry or was that proposed as a site at one stage?*

No, it was a quarry.

*It was a quarry?*

Whether it was proposed as a village site I don't know, it may have been. But the mountain there would have been hopeless in those days. Now, even now, you know, that was the last thing that was developed on the mountain, on site here, without snowmaking it would've never happened because without snowmaking you can't get there.

*One final thing is the early lifts. There's Ramshead and Merritts. They were established in the early days and I believe the technology was all brought in. Can you tell me a bit about who built them and any problems that?*

Apart from the first lifts of pre 1963, 1958 onwards, Mueller from Switzerland designed and built the first chairlift I understand. Local people built the first rope tow but the first chairlift was a Mueller which got extended once or twice. When we came in 1962/63 summer Civil and Civic project managed, designed and built quite a few lifts in that, in that one year. Patterns were set then by two main types; t-bars which are surface lifts, chairlifts which are aerial transport systems. For t-bars, the Doppelmayr design and make was chosen, which was Austrian system. For chairlifts, they decided to send an engineer overseas to sort of research the chairlifts. He came back with a recommendation for the Riblet system of chairlift. It was an American system.

*What was that name?*

Riblet. It was considered at the time to be the Rolls Royce of chairlifts. It was unique in its design in that it had a grip which connects the chair, the stem of the chair with the cable, and was inside the cable instead of outside the cable. It was inserted in the twisting of the wires. Such cable has a hemp core with the steel wires around that. The wires were twisted open, a piece of hemp was taken out and the chair grip was put in there to connect the chair to the cable. Consequently the effect of this was that when the chair rides over the wheels of the tower, there's no boom, boom, boom, boom, boom because the whole cable is smooth. The chair grip is inside the cable and sort of like a T-shape or an L-shape upside down, whereas all of the other lifts then they had a different system. It had a grip on top of the cable which causes a more bumping and especially when there's what you call a holding-down tower where the tower wheels are on top of, above, the cable instead of below because there's a concave vertical section and then the cable has to be held down to the top of the tower. That of course caused a lot of bumping.

*That covers most of the things that I had wanted to talk about. Is there anything that you'd like to add? Particularly about the village?*

The first Master Plan was made in 1964. I think it was approved by the National Parks Services in December of 1965. And as we look at master planning now, it's basically still the same sort of layout of services, facilities and so on. They have added, they've refined it now. They've added zoning for instance which in 1964 was not so small. But it was, it was driven again by the geography of the valley and the facilities of the mountain - the ski resort. So this I think is a true ski village in the sense that the town, the village was subjected to what had to happen on the mountain.

Now in most European villages, it was the other way around. The town was there before the skiing started. In America, it's different again. Where there's a hill, there's no town. They

put the lift at the bottom of the ski hill where they put a huge car-park and they use the next town to get there to and from, which loses its quality of atmosphere.

In Europe you walk through to a lift and you smell a manure heap next to a farm. You have got bells going on at the church on Sunday morning. Very medieval type, peasant type of village because all there was and still is in many cases just farming and nothing else, because these are remote valleys, totally inaccessible for industry. So the atmosphere there is you smell and hear and feel the type of town, the type of an old fashioned, rural village and the skiing came after that and the atmosphere of the town became part of the holiday of the European skiing experience and here instead we are totally different than either of those two, we're different. There's the mountain and we built a village at the bottom and ski from the top. And all those lodges close by and both of them link up so one complements the other. And that I think is .....

*Did the company ever think of building a school or a church or civic buildings that would give that town character?*

Definitely, very much so. In the Lend Lease days, we kept the site in the middle of the village vacant for commercial development in the hope that one day that would be the village centre. There would be a church, a school - the whole type of the site. It didn't happen. A few years after Lend Lease left, the site was taken up by sort of a club.

A rule came in of heights that was equivocally applied. That made a few of the later buildings look like somebody tapped them with a big hammer and pushed them into the ground. Because a roof ridgeline cannot be higher than 1 metre above the floor level of the building above it irrespective of distance, rather than saying we would like that site to have that view of the mountain because the building code says that. You know. Then we would have much more flexibility with site view. It's a bit too late now to have a change because all the damage is done.

*Why do you think that the village centre idea of a church/school didn't take place?*

Because there was no commercial interest and the community was too small and not strong enough to make that happen through community drive. Now the village is getting a little bigger, quite a bit bigger in the last few years. Now it is happening. I'm project managing the church site it's out of the way, because that site is pretty useless for anything else but still not, within walking distance to everywhere, of course. But mind you, a church these days is not any more in the centre as it used to be. The community centre philosophy, again the community centre doesn't necessarily have to be in the middle of the village.

What does have to be in centre of the village is a type of environment which in Europe is called the town square and the village square in old fashioned normal villages and that's what we want to create here, in the centre of the village. We will have a village square, a town square which will be surrounded by buildings alive with activity, right around. Not just on one side and hopefully - a bit like what we have seen growing in Nuggets Crossing Shopping Centre in Jindabyne. Cosiness is the key word.

*And where will you have this?*

We will have that between Squatters Run Stage 2 as it's called and Mowamba Place - sort of opposite the conference centre of the hotel. Because on the very site which I talked to you

before, the first building, the Lodge. When the Lodge was built for that, that's where it is. Exactly where the first building was. The building is not there anymore but the village square will be close.

*One final question and this is your personal views on what places in the village, in the valley, have special significance for you?*

Personally De Dacha would be one building which I designed and built and lived in, then brought up my children for 15 years. But from a social, community point of view, it's very hard to say. When I came here in the first three years there was one place where everybody would congregate in the evenings, and it was called Leo's Lodge. Leo and I agree that that's where the atmosphere was. The only entertainment there was a jukebox there. And that was it and it was used.

After that, The Hotel took over that sort of community thing. The bar in The Bistro as we call it now was called the Five O'Clockers' Bar because after five o'clock, people used to go there. Most of those people would've been workers in construction. In the winter The Schuss Bar became a focal point in the evening and still is now. Twice a week in the summer when there are no tourists here, no visitors here, and all the locals, young people especially who wouldn't have family, go there because that is where you meet.

So various places, at various times have fulfilled that function. That you could call the local pub in a little town in England, it's a bit more than the local pub in sort of the city. Then there are clubs like the local bowls club causes a lot of the local social interaction, in competition and so on. There are barbecue areas which are built specifically for day time use for that local community. The Golf Club takes that on. All this happens in summer because in the winter the community spirit is not visible because the people are all working long hours. The whole atmosphere of course becomes a visitor atmosphere rather than a resident/residential. But it's basically those places that have .....

The village square will hopefully become that again because of the tourists because there's terraces outside, there's the bakery which has seats outside and so on. It's a very sunny place. It's out of the wind. There on the mountain side there will be a gazebo with a sort of a bit of a bar - with Australian beer.

There will be more events I think in future. The Jazz Festival of course that's grown beautifully. Other events, cultural events, and I think if I'm not wrong that will continue as a result of this and the Institute of Sport - I think the ripples of that will be that this village is not going to be forgotten by him and those who are involved in developing an educational location where the changing style of education in its wider content will be represented. For instance where you would have like Coffs Harbour, some things happen, a primary school, high school, TAFE college, courses - education use, the environment use, the National Parks here to help with that as well and that I think is probably Thredbo would be ideal for that. I wouldn't be surprised that we see something, something else in that direction in future.

*Good, I think that's valid. Thank you, Albert.*

Thank you

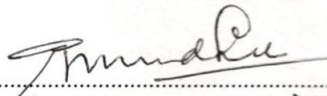
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ALBERT VAN DER LEE

Interviewer.....  ..... Date..... 4th AUGUST 2015  
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