

The Alta Experience
Russ Harmer
Interview Transcript

Russ Harmer

My name is Russ Harmer.

Joey Prokop

And you grew up in Mapleton? Is that Utah County?

Russ Harmer

Utah County, correct.

Joey Prokop

When you were in high school, is that when you first came up to Alta?

Russ Harmer

Correct.

Joey Prokop

So what was your impetus to go up there?

Russ Harmer

I was in to skiing, and also back then Vietnam was, you know, real active in 1966, so I thought I'd go up at least for the winter and see if I could do something fun before I got drafted, you know. So I really went up for one winter and stayed for 33 years.

Joey Prokop

In that time period when you got hired at Alta, what was your initial job?

Russ Harmer

As a cat driver right off the bat. There were just two of us then.

Joey Prokop

What kind of machines were you in?

Russ Harmer

We were using 1200's which were basically you just... they looked like a pickup truck with tracks on it, you know.

Joey Prokop

Using those to try to groom the mountain, what challenges did those present?

Russ Harmer

Well, we used to pull rollers around behind them, you know which are made out of culverts, you know with plates on the end and we'd use those to pack the snow, but there were some steep spots up on Aggies that you couldn't do in a big storm without track-packing it first with the cat and then come back and get the roller, and there were a couple of places like that on the mountain. Mounwell Ballwells was that way too--you had to go around and dig a little road path into Rock Guard and another road back in above the moguls so you could actually go above and then come down and groom it downhill.

Joey Prokop

When you... I guess the thing about grooming on Alta is that you need to pack a couple of runs for people to ski on. There's some places you don't ever have to groom, but I guess talk about some of the challenges of how to figure out... I mean you have to figure this stuff out, so how did you go around, you know if you looked at a certain problem of a place you wanted to groom, how did you think about where you could get the cat, how steep it could go, that kind of thing?

Russ Harmer

I'd go out and ski it first and see if it needed the work, you know. They still do it that way even now--they follow a pattern of always going out and skiing and if it doesn't need working, you can tell pretty easily skiing it, keep it as soft as you can, you don't want to overwork it, you know, so you'd groom some runs, and some runs you wouldn't for that reason like, you know, with Mambo and Main Street, you know a lot of times we could leave Main Street just after we had groomed it the first time, we'd pack the snow on it. We could leave it for quite a while and it would stay softer before we'd groom it. We'd stagger between Mambo and Main Street, you know.

Joey Prokop

So you wouldn't want to pack it down so tight that it turned into hard snow?

Russ Harmer

Ya.

Joey Prokop

How about grooming some of the steeper areas like Warm-up or Stimulation? Did you groom those areas too?

Russ Harmer

We did in the early days as soon as we got plows that were on the furnace snow cats, you know. Then we were able to go down on a pretty fast ride on a lot of those. We kept working with the manufacturers to come up with new ideas of how we could do it better, and one of the ways was with a winch-cat where you could winch yourself up the slope and push a lot of the snow back uphill. Then we started doing runs we'd never done before along wildcat--downhill grooming, because you could do it controlled. When you're winching you can do it real controlled grooming up very very slow and down very very slow.

Joey Prokop

So when you do that kind of winch grooming, explain how that works. You have to have something to tie into...

Russ Harmer

Correct

Joey Prokop

...and then you pull the cat. Basically there's a winch tied to the... is the cat going front ways or back ways?

Russ Harmer

Front ways uphill and then it turns and goes downhill, you know facing downhill, and the winch swivels so that you can go each direction so when you get up to the top you can swivel around and go right back down to the bottom, and when you get to the bottom you swivel around again and then you can go back up. In the early days too, we'd figure out the best place to hookup and we'd just park the snow cat up there and we'd hook it up to it, you know, to learn the best angles of the slope to groom, and then we'd put a permanent post in, you know, at a later date put them out of the way so the skiers don't even see them in a lot of places.

Joey Prokop

And with that, as you were figuring out steeper and steeper places to be able to groom, did you ever run into any issues where you might roll one of these machines or have you ever had any trouble like that?

Russ Harmer

I've never had any trouble like that, but you know we used to groom some steep stuff without, before cables too, and when we got cable cats we didn't groom that much more that we couldn't groom downhill anyway that we hadn't groomed before. There was a couple of runs that we opened up that we hadn't done before downhill grooming. That was over on the backside which we called

Harmer's Highway. That last face on Greeley--we had never done that before until we had the winch cats.

Joey Prokop

So Harmer's Highway--can you kind of describe where that goes for me?

Russ Harmer

You go down Yellow Trail, and then right at the bottom of Yellow Trail you got grizzly gulch, or, no...

Joey Prokop

Glory Hole?

Russ Harmer

Glory Hole, and then along the bench of Glory Hole there's kind of a shelf that you can ski on, you know, the lower part of Greeley there, you ski that shelf on down to the last face and the last face is the new one that we put in. We groomed it the first time--we made a cat track to get back to the lifts, but once we got the winch cats in, we were able to groom that last face too.

Joey Prokop

With that, why don't you tell me a little bit about how some of that equipment has progressed over the years from those pickup trucks with treads on it to what somebody might be driving in now?

Russ Harmer

The difference is a lot more horsepower and a lot more traction on the newer cats. We work with the manufacturers to help design a lot of those--input towards designing them.

Joey Prokop

And did they take input from a lot of different areas throughout the country, or were you someone that they pretty much sought out and knew, you know, you kind of knew your stuff and you'd be a really good resource to kind of explain it to them?

Russ Harmer

The closest to us manufacture-wise was Thiokol. We worked with them pretty exclusively. Of course they worked with a few people in Colorado too, but a lot of what they developed was with us, because then they could build a test model cat and bring it down close by and they could bring it down and groom it out with us--let us groom with it for awhile, and then they'd come down and learn how to groom with it.

Joey Prokop

With that... I guess earlier you were talking about the gellande jump and that mine dump. Can you tell me how you went about building that ramp for those guys to ski off of?

Russ Harmer

Well we used to jump on that slope just down through the ravine and up onto the mine dump. We wanted to take that shape and put it up into the air so that it stood out real big, and Alf Engen and Bill Moss and myself were the three that really, you know, did the design to put it up where you could see it.

Joey Prokop

Did you jump it?

Russ Harmer

Ya.

Joey Prokop

Talk a little bit about... I guess the comment that you made earlier was that, you know, the whole idea was to put it up there and make it look good and scary.

Russ Harmer

Yup, and it accomplished that pretty well.

Joey Prokop

What I'd like to get from you is kind of a nice succinct explanation that you wanted to put the jump up there so it looked scary and it accomplished that.

Russ Harmer

Ya, correct, and Bill Moss had done a lot of jumping in his past, so of course Alf Engen won awards in jumping so between those two, they really helped a lot to fine tune the jump so that they would, you know, cuz they did nordic jumping both of them, but gellande jumps was something they had done too, but if you had nordic jumping background, it really helped a lot in building this jump safe.

Joey Prokop

So when you shaped that, tell me how that came about. Did you bring in snow from somewhere and... how did that happen?

Russ Harmer

We'd gather snow there in the whole area between Corkscrew and Schuss Gully you know, and Nina Curve. We'd strip a lot of snow out of there and pushed it

over to build the jump, and even the very last part of the jump we had to use plywood to form it because it was so high... to get the lip.

Joey Prokop

And then going off of that thing... can you kind of describe what it looked like when you were coming down the ramp at it.

Russ Harmer

Ya, when you got down in the hollow of it, that's when your heart started to really beat hard, and when you went off the end of it, you could actually try to jump at the very end of the jump, or even if you went over and didn't try, you still could get a safe landing because not only did we build the jump up, we built the landing hill back toward it, so it was much safer and made for a longer landing hill.

Joey Prokop

So although you... I guess when you see those guys in those old movies going off of that thing, it looks like they're just winging out into space, but in reality there was a lot of thought that went behind that to make it a safe endeavor?

Russ Harmer

Correct.

Joey Prokop

With that, talk a little bit about Bill Moss, yourself and Alf would, you know kind of pow wow to make that... how the ideas came about?

Russ Harmer

Well the original idea came from like the old ravine jump that all of the employees used to do there, you know, to bring that up so you could really see it, but to get the right shape down and through it was critical because if it threw you a little bit, you wouldn't want to be going off of that thing sideways or angled. That's how Bill and Alf are so good at that fine tuning, you know, to really get it fined tuned that we had the perfect shape so when you went down through the ravine and up the steep part of the jump, you weren't all over the place, you know, it kept, and the people that really did it the best were the ones that could jump a little bit towards the end of the lip. They'd get the best distance like, you know because Bill could really pop it. He won it one year. He could really pop it right at the... towards the end of the jump and that way you get a lot more distance.

Joey Prokop

How about... were you there when the ABC Wide World of Sports covered it?

Russ Harmer

Correct, ya, I was.

Joey Prokop

Tell me a little bit about what the crowd was like. I mean you look at that tape and it seems like it was kind of like a party-like atmosphere. Talk a little bit about maybe the surrounding day. What was going on up there?

Russ Harmer

The crowd got into it for years and then that particular time ABC didn't think the whole thing was, you know, enough action, so they offered money to people to try to jump as far as they could jump on the hill, and we always had the limitation--we wouldn't let them go up too high. We always had a start point where we'd pick the stop part with the four-runner, but they were handing out money to do that, and Alf later on said we should have stopped that and never let that happen you know, which is true, we shouldn't because you know one person got hurt over-jumping the jump--went too far down into the... towards the end of the jump, and that's dangerous to land there. You want to land on the steep part of the jump, not on the hollow at the bottom.

Joey Prokop

And so I guess when did they stop doing the gellandes up there, do you know?

Russ Harmer

Well we brought one back for our 50th anniversary was the last time we did when we brought it back and did it. One reason that we quit way back is we had too many people that were... started to do drugs and too heavy on alcohol and we were starting to have problems with the crowd, so that's the reason that we really stopped having the event, but we brought it back just one time on the 50th anniversary, you know, so that was kind of fun to rebuild it. It took us a little time to dream it up because it was just Alf and me then that was working there at that point in time, but we were able to finally get it fine tuned and back working again.

Joey Prokop

I guess right at the head of the tape we talked about how you came to Alta. Could you kind of recount that story for me again?

Russ Harmer

Yup. I (was) hired on a night, 1st of December, 1966 and Chic Morton was the one who hired me, and what was good about that time period, is that people... the pioneers that helped build Alta from the start I got to know those people

really well by being there early enough that they were all still alive--people like Joe Quinney, who helped start Alta in the very very beginning, Fred Speyer, who had put in the very first lift at Alta and then ran the lifts for many many years. The original name was actually Salt Lake City Winter Sports because that's how... there were a bunch of people that organized the money to put together to try to build it, you know. There were some businessmen in Salt Lake City that put some money together with Joe and tried to start Alta, so that's why it was called Salt Lake City Winter Sports, but you know when you go places, people would recognize that name because we always called ourselves Alta Ski Lifts Company, but later on we changed it to Alta Ski Area so that it didn't confuse people so that they didn't think we were a ski lift manufacturer, you know.

Joey Prokop

With that, I guess the Alta Ski Lifts Company is a pretty apropos name. I mean that's what the place does. It brings people up the hill.

Russ Harmer

Exactly.

Joey Prokop

Why don't you talk a little bit about how Alta isn't, you know, it's not glitzy and... It's all about skiing and the mountain.

Russ Harmer

From the beginning, you know, they really wanted just skiing. They weren't into developing lodging and stuff. There was a few individuals who came in and helped build the lodges. When the railroad came in they started to build the Alta lodge when they were trying to decide between the Sun Valley and Alta. They started it, but they never finished it and J. Laughlin came in and finished the Alta lodge and him and Chic Morton were both owners of it for many, many years, but when Chic was managing the lifts and helping manage the lodge, they decided it would be better if Chic just went to managing the lifts and they'd, you know, have somebody else manage the lodge, so it went that way for quite a few years, and eventually Chic and Joe sold out to Bill Leavitt because they had brought him in as a partner to help do one of the expansions on the lodge, but then they decided to sell out to him and just stay with the lift business, and J. had managed to acquire all of the controlling stock of the company, so he was the controlling stock holder for many many years, and now that he has passed, his son stepped into his shoes. It hasn't really changed a lot. They still have the same philosophy, you know. They always wanted to money to go back into Alta to run it, so they'd be in the black and they wouldn't buy things until they could afford to buy it, you know, like new chair lifts they'd save up, you know, because they were getting awfully expensive. In the early days they were like half a million dollars, now their anywhere from one to three million dollars.

Joey Prokop

With that, I guess conservative kind of attitude of Alta, I read a quote from Rick Lawson that Joe Quinney said you know, a pretty early life lesson that Joe taught Rick was like here's the difference between Alta and other ski areas is that Alta gets paid by the bank to use Alta's money vs. other ski areas paying to use the banks money.

Russ Harmer

Ya, one of Joe's philosophies was you collect interest, you don't pay interest, you collect interest, and he made himself a lot of money through the years doing that, you know.

Joey Prokop

Did you know J. Laughlin at all?

Russ Harmer

A little bit, yup. When he'd come out and stay I'd got to know him, so...

Joey Prokop

I'm learning a bit about him and how he's, you know, a New York publisher in one world, and the other world he's the controlling owner of Alta Ski Company, or ski area. Talk a little bit about what kind of a guy he was.

Russ Harmer

He was really a mountaineer in the early years when he was young, you know and so he started coming to Alta way way back, not too long after it started and got really involved, and he helped make decisions about Alta up until his death-- him and Joe Quinney. Joe Quinney was actually the president that would help, you know, direct Chic on managing the ski area, but J. was always involved with Joe, you know, and they were good friends and they trusted each other a lot, and then Chic, so he could spend time with J., they would go up and go fly fishing in Wyoming every year together.

Joey Prokop

What kind of a guy was Chic Morton?

Russ Harmer

Chic Morton was the best guy you could ever meet for a manager of, you know, a people person, you know, he really let you... each department run themselves up there to the point where they could be creative and, you know, and change things like through the grooming through the years, a lot of those decisions, he would leave that all up to you to do it, you know.

Joey Prokop

What kind of a guy was Chic Morton as far as running the ski area?

Russ Harmer

Chic was extremely good at running the ski area and... like when he hired me originally, as an example, you know, since I had the farming background, he hired me and I went to work the very next day, and then after working there a couple of months, the other cat driver was messing up, so I was telling Chic that the other cat driver was messing up and he says, "Well you go fire him." And you know that was how I really ended up with the job being in charge of the grooming and the snow cats at that point. So, you know, Chic would help you with the leadership, you know, of getting started into that stuff and give you advice anytime that you needed it, you know. In other words, you could communicate with Chic and Joe Quinney personally, you know, not necessarily everybody went right to Joe for things, but one thing in particular I remember that Chic was really against the snow mobiles, you know, and we wanted some snow mobiles for the ski patrol to bring cases in from Sugarloaf since Sugarloaf was a long pull to bring them clear back to the base area, you know, to the first aid room. So Chic wasn't having any of it, and I was sitting up there at the gellande with Joe talking to him about how safer it would be if we could have snow mobiles to help pull the access from Sugarloaf back down to the first aid room and he said, "Well let's go buy some then." So that's the only time I remember going around Chic and talking to Joe for something, you know, and not go through Chic on it, so he was a little perturbed at me, but, you know he understood what I was doing and actually was glad that we did it after he'd been doing it just a short time.

Joey Prokop

So in your time up there you worked under Chic?

Russ Harmer

Correct.

Joey Prokop

And then you worked under Onno for awhile?

Russ Harmer

Yup.

Joey Prokop

Then it must have been kind of interesting the transition between Chic and Onno because Chic had run it for many years and then Onno was taken over.

Russ Harmer

Ya it's totally different--a different management style, between Chic and Onno. I worked for my last nine years at Alta right as Onno's assistant manager.

Joey Prokop

And with that, was Onno... I mean I see him out there skiing all of the time. Is he a more on-the-mountain kind of guy?

Russ Harmer

Yup, and he spends a lot of time in each department helping make decisions for the departments, rather than let them all run their own department, you know, on their own. So that's the difference between Chic and Onno, especially is Chic would let you run you department and not micromanage ya. Onno tends to micromanage his departments.

Joey Prokop

Oh I see. Lets talk a little bit about... when you came up there in '66, you said that there were still some of those pioneers that started the resort, started you know... who were some of the people that you enjoyed knowing over the years up there?

Russ Harmer

Fred Speyer, Joe Quinney, Buck Sasaki, who was ahead of our lifts, and Hans Brogle, who was the assistant over the lifts.

Joey Prokop

Actually I talked to... Bucks would sit down and do an interview for this show as well.

Russ Harmer

I think that's great because he knows more history about Alta than any of us put together.

Joey Prokop

And he's having eye surgery so he's going to wait for a couple of weeks, but that's not really here or there, but he seems like a really nice guy.

Russ Harmer

Ya he is.

Joey Prokop

Alta has kind of a certain cache as being maybe... I don't know. There's

something about Alta that is different than Snowbird, different than Solitude, different than basically any ski area. What do you think makes Alta unique and special?

Russ Harmer

I think the people, you know. A lot of people come and don't think they're going to stay very long, but they enjoy being with other people at Alta so much that they end up staying or coming back year after year.

Joey Prokop

I know a lot of people who have moved here, specifically to ski at Alta.

Russ Harmer

Ya there's a lot of people in town that are powder skiers that specifically like to ski at Alta.

Joey Prokop

How about talking a little bit about how running the cats on the mountain, especially early season, kind of gives you an intimate knowledge of the mountain, and how that might translate like where you like to ski and that kind of thing.

Russ Harmer

Like when we built Sugarloaf originally, you know, Bill Moss and I picked out a lot of the ski runs for Sugarloaf lift because the first year I was at Alta, Germania didn't even go clear to the ridge. You had to hike the last bit to ski the back side, you know, so we needed to figure out runs for the next year for Sugarloaf so that we could do some work on them in the summer, you know, cut some trees and get some rocks removed, try to make, you know, Devil's Elbow Road and Roller Coaster and Extrovert we drew the main runs over there.

Joey Prokop

Were you there when Supreme went in?

Russ Harmer

Yes I had a lot to do with Supreme because I was living up there in a cabin right next to where we put the ski lift and found a route, a corridor between private property, and so it was all forest service, and approached the forest service about the use of forest land, you know. It's a campground and it would be a good corridor to use to go up through the campground and... One of the forest service guys really objected and the head guy said, no." He thought it was a good idea, so that helped a lot since he decided it sounded like a good idea that we were able to go ahead and build that lift and pick out those runs and make

those runs work.

Joey Prokop

Was there a bit of controversy with expanding into Albion Basin when that all happened?

Russ Harmer

Oh ya, we had quite a long time of going through the, you know, environmental process and stuff to do that, and we left kind of... on Supreme we also left... the Catherine side is kind of like going back in history like, you know, the Albion Basin side used to be from Collins side, you know so you have to hike over to actually ski that part of it.

Joey Prokop

What about the... the interesting thing about Alta is that there isn't, you know there's other places where they could put lifts where people could get... you know they could put lifts here, there, and everywhere so people never had to hike anywhere. Was that a conscious decision to make it so, you know, you still had to hike to get to some places in order to preserve the quality of the skiing?

Russ Harmer

Very much so, so we'd have the right kind of variety between groomed slopes and non-groomed slopes, steep slopes and moderate slopes, so it had a lot to do with placement of lifts.

Joey Prokop

How about the idea that... I don't know if this is true or not, but they say that they run the lifts a little slower because people are down in the lift line and as you go skiing, you're quality is more enjoyable because there are fewer people out skiing and everyone's kind of concentrated at the bottom.

Russ Harmer

There was a time here where we did that a little bit, but not too much you know.

Joey Prokop

It's just kind of the nature of ski fast and get back pretty much?

Russ Harmer

Right.

Joey Prokop

How about over the years, the changes, when you first came up there, what lifts were up there?

Russ Harmer

Wild Cat, Collins--the original Collins single chair, so I had some time spent on it. When I had some free time they used to grab me to sit and operate the top terminal sometimes, even Chic used to go out and operate the top terminal. He liked that to get out of the office and go up and sit on a lift again, you know. So he was the first to jump to it if they needed somebody, but they'd also call myself, you know and Buck and Hans that were in charge of the lift department, they used to do it a lot too because we only used that on busy dates. We had scheduled people to work on it on weekends, but during the week we had a surprise busy day. Collins lift wasn't normally running, but we could keep it running if enough people showed up that day.

Joey Prokop

I imagine they upgraded the motors and things over the years on that thing?

Russ Harmer

Yup. We ended up rebuilding it through the years lots of times, you know, and we used to have to slide the cable through the towers, you know, so that they wouldn't sit there and flex in the same spot year after year because it could break it that way, in fact, there was a gondola in Colorado that that's the reason it actually broke and dropped because they hadn't slid the cables through and had them flex in a different place, and they learned that from the mining people that actually... you know the miners had not done that sometimes and it had to fail on them so... the early lift especially was designed so much like the mining trams, you know, that they got a lot of advice from the mechanics that worked on the mining tramways.

Joey Prokop

How about Fred's Slot. Why is it called Fred's Slot?

Russ Harmer

That's where the old Germania lift that he put in there was, and after we tore that lift down and did the new Germania lift, we called that one chute Fred's Slots since he had picked that out to put it there.

Joey Prokop

When they moved the Germania chair, did they purposely, you know...

Russ Harmer

We put it up higher, yup!

Joey Prokop

...put it up higher and obviously you got to pick a flat spot for the top terminal.

Russ Harmer

Ya we had to kind of create that flat spot on the top terminal, which wasn't big enough for a lot of years. We finally got permission to go in and make it bigger, you know, and again when they switched to just Collins lift being one lift, you know, from the bottom to the top, it took more room up there to unload peaceful and disperse them, you know, onto the slopes.

Joey Prokop

Do you think that that reason...? I mean I guess you went to Alta for one season...

Russ Harmer

Correct.

Joey Prokop

...and then you ended up staying for 33 years.

Russ Harmer

I ended up hurting my back that first season so that kept me out of going to Vietnam, so I stayed at Alta from that point on.

Joey Prokop

And then staying there over the years... I mean was it a great place to work? Think about what it would be like to go to work in the morning, or I guess you did a lot of it in the evening, but...

Russ Harmer

And then in the summer months what was great about being there is we'd work four 10-hour days and take Friday's off, so we started that schedule in the summer. In the wintertime we were working six days a week, you know, for years and years, but after a while we finally got enough staff that we could take two days off a week, but in the early years nobody took two days off a week.

Joey Prokop

I've heard quotes that Joe Quinney said that Alta is for the people of Utah and that the outsiders are allowed to come here too. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Russ Harmer

Ya. Joe always felt that it was originally started for people in Salt Lake and Utah, and one reason he tried to hold the price down for a lot of years was to,

you know, make it affordable for people in Salt Lake to ski there, and it worked for a long long time you know.

Joey Prokop

Lets talk a bit about Joe Quinney's theory about... you know Alta is for the locals and the people of Utah, but the outsiders are allowed to come too.

Russ Harmer

Ya Joe... when they started Alta originally, it was a bunch of businessmen in Salt Lake, you know, for the people in Utah, you know, so he was always trying to keep the price of the lift ticket reasonable at Alta for the locals, and people that came from out of state just gave them the extra money to expand and to do improvements, so...

Joey Prokop

Why don't you talk a little bit about how those improvements... like when you first came up there, there was Wild Cat, Collins...

Russ Harmer

Albion.

Joey Prokop

...Albion, so then when did Germania go in?

Russ Harmer

The original went in not... a couple of years after the first lift when in, the first one you know. I think it was probably about '40, '41. There was another lift up there that they never rebuilt that was the old Peruvian lift that would take you from in front of the old Watson up to where the gun mount is now, just barely under the gun mount point, so they could ski all of that Wild Cat terrain originally from the first Collins lift and then the Peruvian lift took you up that way.

Joey Prokop

When that burned down they didn't rebuild it?

Russ Harmer

Correct, and then they decided to build Wild Cat lift.

Joey Prokop

As you've seen the changes over the years, do you think that Alta is still similar to when you first showed up there?

Russ Harmer

Ya, it's still very similar I mean as far as how they treat the customers is still very good, and the employees are very very good. Not many of the old timers are still there anymore. They've all retired you know.

Joey Prokop

With that, when you think about Alta, the whole reason for Alta was to give people a place to ski.

Russ Harmer

Ya, and how it started originally too is Joe and them would help work with the miners as far as getting the service land donated to the forest service to create Alta as being a ski area itself. You know that was step one.

Joey Prokop

And step two was to get the people... enough investors together to...

Russ Harmer

...to build the first lift.

Joey Prokop

And when that first lift... I guess what I'm getting at is Alta is still all about skiing. It's not about getting a massage...

Russ Harmer

Correct.

Joey Prokop

...it's not about, you know, shopping.

Russ Harmer

Skiers is what it was built for originally, and that's what it still is today.

Joey Prokop

With that, you were a skier who skied that mountain. Do you think the mountain has changed at all?

Russ Harmer

Well the skiing patterns have changed a little bit by different lift designs, they've changed in lifts, you know, and so... like the new Collins lift going all the way as one lift has changed the patterns of where people ski a little bit, you know.

Joey Prokop

But ultimately when I ski over on Punch Bowl, its still Punch Bowl. It's still the

same place that you skied. It's the same place that Alf Engen skied.

Russ Harmer

Right.

Joey Prokop

Talk about, I guess, the whole idea of Alta is that it's a place to go and maybe lose yourself, maybe if you're concentrating on your wallet or whatever problem you got going on, and you're skiing, you're not going to do that well. It's a place where you can...

Russ Harmer

...ski and take in nature at the same time.

Joey Prokop

Talk a little bit about the beauty of the place. Over the years you've got to see it in all kinds of daylight, all kinds of storms, all kinds of... talk a little bit about why it's so beautiful up there.

Russ Harmer

Well a lot has to do with, believe it or not, all of the wild flowers that Alta has was really created more by the sheep that used to graze at Alta because they'd, you know, carry wildflowers from all over the place and deposit them in the basin and moved all around, which created some of the most beautiful wild flowers you'll find anywhere in the world.

Joey Prokop

If you could have yourself transported one place at Alta that you would just like to sit and look... I mean one of those places that speaks to your heart, where's that spot?

Russ Harmer

Devil's Castle because I used to have a cabin up there where I could see Devil's Castle from it.

Joey Prokop

And when you think about Devil's Castle how does it make you feel?

Russ Harmer

All warm. I saw... one year when I was driving one of our trucks up on Supreme, on the way back down I spotted a mountain goat on top of the cliffs of Devil's Castle which surprised me. I'd never seen one up there--a great big guy. In fact, when they brought those goats in originally it was like the first summer I

was at Alta they brought some in and put them up on the top of Mount Superior and then they, you know, multiplied from there and moved down the canyon and are all over the place now, but that was the original start. I think there was about six of them that they flew with the helicopter in front of the old town office buildings which were our original bunk house, you know, up to the top of Mount Superior.

Joey Prokop

And did you meet Jeannie up there?

Russ Harmer

Yes we did.

Joey Prokop

Talk a little bit about why that might make Alta a special place for you.

Russ Harmer

I met my wife up there. She was working in the Gold Miner's Daughter in reservations and as soon as I met her we started going out and a couple of years later.

Joey Prokop

Where did you get married?

Russ Harmer

We got married at the Rustler Lodge.

Joey Prokop

So Alta is a place that's near and dear to your heart?

Russ Harmer

Oh ya very much so. It's a big part of our life, you know, was spent at Alta, you know. We still go up and ski there.

Joey Prokop

When you go up there and ski there, you connect with old friends? How does that all work?

Russ Harmer

Ya, we see a lot of our old friends up there or take old friends from down here and all go up and ski.,