

ALTA

Keller

Joey Prokop:

Alta kind of has a history before the ski area as far as the mining history. Can you talk a little bit about the two distinct periods of real mining activity up there and just kind of delineate those for me?

Charles:

There were two major periods of mining. The first started in the middle 1860's. It sort of hit a crest in 1873 to 1875 period and then it started to decline. In the 1890's there was very little mining going on anymore, almost non-existent and then in the early 1900's it started up again and ran up into...actually some of the mines were running into the 1950's and even into 1960.

Joey Prokop:

What was the last mine that closed down up there?

Charles:

I'm not sure I know. There was one running where the old Hecla Mine was which was under the lift to the right of Collins, under the Wildcat lift. That was running in the 1960's because I remember seeing trucks going up there and men going in and out. There was one mine over at Silverfork in Big Cottonwood Canyon that was running up until about 10 years ago. It didn't produce much but the owner was still working it.

Joey Prokop:

Let's talk about how the landscape has been transformed by mining activities, specifically Little Cottonwood Canyon.

Charles:

I suspect the transformation started before the mining era. It was the result of the lumbering industry. There were a couple of sawmills up in Little Cottonwood

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Canyon and up until the time that the miners showed up they were working generally around Red Pine and White Pine forks – taking out the lumber. The sawmill was down at Hogum Fork. So they had stripped a lot of timber before the miners showed up and then when the miners came in and started creating a market for the logs right there in the canyon, the logging people moved up and put in a steam sawmill up at the fork where the North Fork and East Fork come together. That is the creek that comes out at Grizzly Gulch and the one that comes down from Albion Basin – right where the two flow together, that's where the steam sawmill was put in. Then they started taking a lot of logs out of the Albion Basin area and up in Grizzly Gulch. In 1871 the Emma people bought the sawmill and they moved it. I don't know where they moved it but the years that followed, the sawmill showed up at Grizzly Gulch and a number of other places. As a result they were taking timber wherever they could find it. In fact about that same time there was a group of men that formed a road company that went from Alta across Twin Lakes Pass and into the basin where the Twin Lakes are today to bring lumber across. I don't think their transportation company ever amounted to anything but it shows that they were reaching way out to get timber.

Joey Prokop:

Do you think that removing of all the timber set up the avalanche danger and avalanche situation that we have up there today?

Charles:

Oh yes, well not today but certainly what happened in the 1870's and 1880's was a result of nothing on the hillsides to hold the snow anymore.

Joey Prokop:

Talk a little bit about some of the different towns. There was Central City, there was Alta. What were some of the different settlements up there?

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Charles:

When the first series of miners came in there...let's back up. When the prospectors came in first they didn't go any further up the canyon than Red Pine and White Pine because that's as far as the road went and beyond that it was wilderness. But then when the serious miners came in they built a trail on up the canyon and they stopped when the canyon leveled out a little bit and that's about where the Peruvian Lodge is today. They setup a camp there. Samuel Woolley who was running the sawmill down at Hogum Fork wrote in his journal that he went up the canyon to the Gentile Mining Camp to do some business selling lumber to them. So that's where the community that was known as Central City was formed and that's just about at the west end of the Peruvian Lodge today. Then as the mining increased people started moving up closer to the sawmill because that was convenient to both the Emma Mine and the mines up in Grizzly Gulch and that's what became Alta City. I think Alta City...the first time we see that name was in late 1871 and I've got photographs that were taken then and it was just a couple of shacks here and there. But it started to grow from that. There is an interesting story about the quarter section that Alta City (now that's not the Alta we think of today) but where Alta City sat was actually purchased by the...it came into the hands of the Walker brothers and they platted it and the plat is on file in the county records office and they started selling lots. Well on the plat some of these shacks that were built during the 1870's were right in the middle of the streets so they decided "we're going to have some order in this town, we've got to get rid of those things and have them moved onto lots" which they did. So the first pictures that we see of Alta City, you see these scatterings of shacks here and there but then later in the 1872/1873 pictures there's actually a street there or at least an open area that goes nice and straight without any buildings in it.

Joey Prokop:

So how many streets did Alta end up having?

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Charles:

On the plat it runs about 8 streets east and west and maybe 6 streets north and south. The plot actually went further than that. The original plats went up the side of the mountain (on both sides) but I don't think that there was ever more than three east/west streets and maybe four north/south streets. There's only one or two of those that was actually something we'd call a street today. The rest were just routes or paths or trails.

Joey Prokop:

So it actually had more streets than the town of Alta does now.

Charles:

Yes, as a matter of fact it does. The highway today where it comes up into Alta, where it goes past the Rustler Lodge and past the Snowpine Lodge is right on one of the original Alta streets but it was one that wasn't used then; except it was used by the tramway but not as a street.

Joey Prokop:

Talk a little bit about the Michigan Tramway and where that ran and how that ended up being kind of the raw materials for the Collins lift.

Charles:

Well the tramway that I just mentioned was not the Michigan Tramway it was the Mule Tramway, the rail tramway that came up. When it got into Alta it went up to the Bay City Tunnel which is just a little bit east of the Snowpine Lodge, so that was the end of that tramway. The Michigan/Utah Tramway started way up in Grizzly Gulch and went down to Tanners Flat, and if you look down that canyon you'll see it has kind of a dogleg in it and you think "how did they do that?" I think the first time they built it they actually tried to have a station in the middle where it would change direction and that didn't work out too well so they built one that

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went straight down. It was well above where the highway is today at Alta; it was up on the side of the hill. It would've crossed the highway just about where the Peruvian Lodge was and then it crossed the highway again further down and went way up on the side of the hill and then finally dropped down to Tanners Flat.

Joey Prokop:

Where that big stone wall is?

Charles:

That's from the old horse tramway. When they built that tramway...the people that had been waiting for good transportation for years and it wasn't until 1875 that the tramway finally reached Alta. Then they were able to bring supplies up to ship ore down which was a great advantage because they didn't have to load them on wagons and take them down with teams. Except when it started snowing they found they couldn't run the tramway anymore and to get year round operation, they actually built snow sheds over that tramway for almost the complete length. The snow sheds were built such that on the uphill side of the track they had a stone wall and then they had the beams resting on the stone wall; they came down right at the same slope as the mountain so that the snow would slide down. It would slide right over the top of the tramway. So at one time there were these stone walls along the whole length of the tramway but the only ones that are left are the ones you see now down around White Pine. That's what that's from.

Joey Prokop:

Talk a little bit about its heyday and the first mining era what the town of Alta might have been like. When you hear about accounts of snow slides killing 50 people and we know that's not true. People being shot at the bars with their boots on, how much of this is true?

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Charles:

I think that's a big stretch of the imagination. I found that, yeah there were a lot of fights, there were even gunfights going on but there were fights and gunfights going on down in Salt Lake City too. When you think 'here's a camp way up in the mountains and a bunch of rough miners at the end of the day they come down and have a couple drinks and sure there are going to be brawls'. But I didn't find that there were that many actual killings. In fact there were probably more deaths due to suicide than there were due to gunfights. In fact the editor in the Tribune made a comment about the number of suicides at Alta and he said "it must be a matter of this town being so close to heaven".

Joey Prokop:

I've heard some theories that Hell Gate and Devils' Castle and those names of those rock formations have something to do with the strife between the gentiles at Alta and the general LDS population down in the valley.

Charles:

No I don't think so. Most of the names that you see up there came as the result of names of mines and often when a mine started running on the side of the hill then they called that...like the Flagstaff mine was way up on the side of the hill on the north side of Alta and they called that Flagstaff Hill and in fact there's still Flagstaff mountain on the maps up above the Flagstaff mine. So I think in a lot of cases the names like Hell Gate and even Snowbird came from mines, mining claims, and names of mining claims. That's not true with Devil's Castle and I haven't been able to find where that name came from.

Joey Prokop:

How about the Collins Gulch? How did that get its name?

Charles:

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That was named after Charles Collins. He had a group with claims up there in that gulch and he started working them and was doing very well with them; so well that he was able to sell them as the 'Collins Group' and that's where the Collins Gulch name came from. Now the fact that so many of these names survived I think is a tribute to George Watson because he was kind of a character. He loved to tell stories and I think when the ski people started coming up there, he knew the names of all these mines so he just kind of hung onto them and pushed them off onto the new crowd that was showing up. That's why you find all these names like 'Rustler', there was a Rustler mine up there on High Rustler and (I should be able to think of a dozen of them). Peruvian mine, Wildcat, they were all names of mining claims.

Joey Prokop:

Just kind of go back and tick off a couple of those names and say how those are all originally mining names.

Charles:

Well Grizzly Gulch, Grizzly was one of the very very early claims up in there. Davenport Hill, the Davenport mine was up in the pass between Grizzly Gulch and Silverfork. Let's see, what's next going down that way? Well Flagstaff Hill we already mentioned, there was Toledo Hill named after the Toledo Mine. Cardiff Pass, the Cardiff Mine over near the side.

Joey Prokop:

Let's go back and talk a little bit about George Watson and how he kind of bridged the mining days into the skiing days. He was pretty much the central figure that really made that happen.

Charles:

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Well I don't know if he made it happen but he certainly supported it when the skiers started coming up there. I suspect that he realized that the mining days were in the past and he was there holding all these claims and probably a lot of mortgages too and this was a way to make the thing start up again. Maybe not as a mine but to get people up there and get a new economy started. When he turned over all that land to the United States, not actually to the Forest Service, he just turned over the surface rights and he kept the mineral rights. But nothing much ever happened after that.

Joey Prokop:

He owned all the mine plans and surface rights and turned them over to the United States Government with the caveat that they would be used as a ski area?

Charles:

I don't know, I never looked at the deed when he did that because like I said, I'm not pursuing the ski history. I probably should have looked at that. I don't know if there was a clause in there saying that it should be used for skiing or not but that was certainly the intent.

Joey Prokop:

Can you talk a little bit about how some of the tourism that got going up there? How did that all work to get people to come up there in the summer?

Charles:

There wasn't any tourist business going up to Alta until the Brighton Hotel got to be popular. The trip up to the Brighton Hotel was a pretty tough trip. It would take a good part of a day to get up there and a good part of the day to get back. So it wasn't something you could do for a Sunday afternoon. When people realized that they could...well after the tramway was in and was operating,

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people realized that they could get up to Alta pretty fast and painlessly by taking the train to Sandy and then there was a narrow gauge railroad going up to Wasatch at the mouth of the canyon and then they could take the tramway up to Alta and then they'd take a horse or go on foot over Twin Lakes Pass and down into Brighton. This started bringing a lot of people through there. In fact, Brighton's son Daniel Brighton is reported to have put in the first road over Twin Lakes pass so people could take a wagon or a carriage from Alta over to Brighton rather than having to go on foot or on horse. In the late 19 teens – 1917/1918 is when they rebuilt that railroad up to Alta. It didn't run as a railroad very long but after that they had the so-called Jitney which was essentially an automobile or a truck with railroad wheels on it and a couple of bench seats and they'd drive up the railroad up to Alta and this was used almost daily, well a couple of times a week to haul mail up to Alta. They didn't use it to haul ore or anything like that. But then the people going to Brighton could start riding that, and they also used it just for sort of like joy rides. At that time Wasatch Resort at the mouth of the canyon was pretty popular and you had a lot of people there in the summertime and they would take daytrips up the Jitney. Take the Jitney up to Alta and spend some time up there and then come back down. At that time there were a couple of eating establishments in Alta, mostly to support miners but they probably didn't do that much business until the tourists started coming. That must have done a little bit for the economy but this would have been in the late 1920's.

Joey Prokop:

When did they make the transformation from the narrow gauge railroad to the road that you could actually drive cars on?

Charles:

Well that was in the 1930's. Probably the depression had something to do with that because as you know the government had all kinds of alphabet organizations that were spending money around the country trying to get people

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back to work and I suspect that some of it had to do with that. Like the CCC and the WPA and those people. But the railroad wasn't being used anymore except for the Jitney. In fact by the time it was taken out it wasn't even being used by the Jitney. The Jitney had a very bad accident going down one day where one man was killed and a couple people hurt and after that they didn't run the Jitney anymore. So the right away was sold to the state and the tracks were taken up and that's when they started building the highway.

Joey Prokop:

Do you think that the ski area probably couldn't have happened without the road? Do you think it was some kind of impetus from the Salt Lake Winter Sports Association to get into that?

Charles:

I'm sure there was. I'm sure there were a lot of people pushing for the highway.

Joey Prokop:

Do you know of any specific people that might have been?

Charles:

No, just the people who were in the Salt Lake Winter Sports Association.

Joey Prokop:

I guess that was the original name before the resort became Alta. The second mining boom, that's when George Watson shows up in Little Cottonwood Canyon, what spurred that on?

Charles:

Actually it was the Jacobson's. The Jacobson family. Anton Jacobson was up there as early as 1870 and then his sons Tony Jacobson and Alfred but he

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always went by AO, they came in just about 1900, they're fairly young men now and had their own ideas about mining and one of them was that you had to be able to move large quantities down to the smelters and if you couldn't do that you had to concentrate them on the site. So the stuff that you take down there is of high value ore. The Jacobson's started the South Columbus Consolidated. They had about four different companies that were going. In fact the South Columbus was over on the south side of the canyon just about where the ski lifts go up now (the Albion and the Wildcat ski lift) and they actually built that big boarding house that was always called 'Watson's Hotel' or 'Watson's Boarding House', and then they ran into some trouble where they had to put assessments on the stock and the stockholders got upset with them so they threw them out and that's when George Watson stepped in and picked up the pieces and started working. But his workings were primarily on the south side of the canyon.

Joey Prokop:

Watson ends up becoming kind of the 'last man standing' up there, you know, appoints himself the Mayor. I mean he was the last guy up there; can you talk a little bit about that?

Charles:

He was the self appointed mayor and that was only after people started showing up. He probably never did that before the late 1940's. There was no reason to do it.

Joey Prokop:

Give us a little idea of what a colorful character he was.

Charles:

Well while they were still running the Jitney's, when he had people coming up there to visit the camp (usually to visit his operations) he would ride with them on

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the Jitney and give them a running commentary on the way up there. There are reports that he used to tell them “Up there, there is land that no one has ever seen and there are wild animals that you don’t want to meet” and things like that. When the skiing activities started and people started coming up there and spending time at the lodges he would have all kinds of neat things that he’d push off on them, like the Christmas Club which was a big stick of wood that he could beat someone with, that was his Christmas Club. His ‘do it yourself brain surgery kit’ and things like that. He was a character for sure.

Joey Prokop:

I’ve seen little cards that he used to give to people about being in the miners club.

[Interruption]

Charles:

That’s why it got its name ‘Bay City’ and immediately it was bought out by a group from St. Louis and the St. Louis people did most of the early work on the Bay City Tunnel. But it was going in right under the Emma and when the Emma had a lot of trouble with their own tunnels (this was still in say ’72, ’73 period) they realized that the Bay City could be the way to go in and get the Emma loaded at a little bit lower level than they’d been before and after that most of the mining for the Emma has been through the Bay City Tunnel. So that went for a long time. Way back in that tunnel they actually sank a shaft and started running drifts at several levels below it and what would always happen when they put a shaft way far down in that country is they’d hit water and then you had to start pumping and pumping was pretty difficult especially when you had a lot of water and that’s what happened. They got down to something like 500 levels and they had so much water they couldn’t pump it anymore. That’s the water that Alta is using today.

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[Interruption]

Joey Prokop:

Can you re-tell us the about the Bay City mine and where the Alta water supply is today?

Charles:

Yes. In that shaft way back in the mine they were pumping it out of there.

Joey Prokop:

Talk a little bit about what kind of mining and the mining activities at Alta. There's hard rock mining and they were looking for silver...talk about the nuts and bolts of how that all worked.

Charles:

Most of the miners were after silver but I think all the successful mines made their expenses with lead because they'd get a lot more lead than they did silver. Silver was kind of the cream on the crop. In the early days the transportation of ore was a real problem so when they'd pull the ore out of the mine they would actually sort it by hand and they would put it in sacks and stitch them up. So you'd have this bag of ore – 70 to 100 pounds each and that's how it was taken down the canyon. This worked to their advantage too because between the mine and the smelter they'd have to change modes of transportation several times. For instance they'd put them in a wagon and take them down the canyon to Wasatch and then they'd put them on a railroad car (a narrow gauge railroad car) and take them down to Sandy and then they'd have to move it on a standard gauge railroad car to go off to the smelters. So all of the very rich ore was taken out – put in the sacks and taken out. The rest of it just went on to the dump and as a result years later when people started using concentrating techniques and they had better modes of transportation, a lot of those dumps were reworked and

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a lot of them were reworked more than once where they could salvage all that stuff that wasn't rich enough to take out in the early days. They made a living doing that. That's why you go up to where the Emma Mine was and all you find is a big pit there, I mean it's all torn up and that's by people going back in and trying to rework the thing. You go up to the Flagstaff dump and it doesn't look at all like it did in photographs that were taken in the late 19th century because people were up there reworking the dump just to salvage the low grade ore. It was this way with the copper bearing ore too. In the early days that was worthless, I mean it was just something they just had to put up with and it all went out in the dump but when the copper started getting used, probably in the 1880's somewhere around there then suddenly the copper started to mean something to them and they'd start advertising that their ore has this much percent copper, where before they wouldn't talk about that stuff.

Joey Prokop:

When you go up to Alta now and look around, can you think about what it would be like to be up there in the 1880's and maybe what it would sound like and was the activity going on so below the surface that you wouldn't hear drill rigs and things like that?

Charles:

No I think about the only thing you'd hear is sometimes when they'd be blasting you'd hear that. But I doubt there was much beyond that. I suspect it was pretty quiet.

Joey Prokop:

When you go into one of those mines, were the men working with pick and shovel or were they working with a steam hammer?

Charles:

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At first it was pick and shovel and hammer and drill bits. It was all manual labor. The pneumatic tools came in probably not until late, very late 19th century. In the 20th century when they started mining then generally they were using power tools, the pneumatic tools.

Joey Prokop:

I have to wonder about how the landscape had been transformed up there. What would it have looked like first and then contrast what it would look like after the sawing and mining activities that occurred up there.

Charles:

I don't know what it looked like first. You'd like to think that it was all heavily wooded and it probably was but probably not like you see in the lower part of Big Cottonwood Canyon, I don't think it was that dense a forest. But by the time the mining started, let's say by 1873 there wasn't much timber left. In fact in 1902 when (a man's name I can't think of now, working for the Government), he was making a survey of all the forests in the west and was kind of a leading up to the creation of the Forest Service. But he went up into Big Cottonwood Canyon and wrote a report, and went up Little Cottonwood and wrote a report and his comment about Little Cottonwood was 'that you would be hard pressed to find a stick big enough to beat a snake'. So it sort of indicates that there wasn't much left there.

Joey Prokop:

There's some theory that Patrick Edward Connor wanted to get some sort of mining boom going in Utah to inundate the dominate culture. Is there any credence to that?

Charles:

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Yes, I think that's so. There is documentation where he talks about getting loyal gentiles to come in and he felt that the mining would be a way to do that because the local people weren't much into mining. Brigham Young discouraged that but you have to be careful with that too. To say Brigham Young discouraged mining just isn't true. He actually encouraged it for things like coal and limestone and stuff like that. What he discouraged was going after precious metals – silver and gold, something that wasn't going to do anything for the local economy which was a very closed economy. He wanted people to do something that was going to help people eat or have a place to live and things like that.

Joey Prokop:

Talk a little bit about Patrick Connor and tell us who he was, tell us how and why he wanted to encourage prospecting among his men.

Charles:

He was a Californian and he came here as head of the California Volunteers and they came from the area of California around Stockton. Most of them had been miners there, so when they came in here his assignment here was to protect the mail route coming in from the east and also the telegraph lines which had just been put in very recently. But he expanded his assignment to look for a solution to the Mormon question and I'm not sure what the question was, but he seemed to think that he was the answer. His answer was to bring in the loyal gentiles and get enough of them to overwhelm the local people. His way of doing that was to create a mining industry and he suspected that there were lots of precious metals in these mountains so he encouraged his men to go out and do some prospecting which they did. To think that Connor went up to Alta and discovered the Emma mine or something like that is not at all true. I don't know if Connor ever saw Alta. In all the mining district records, you only find his name in there a half dozen times and I'm sure it was put in there in absencia. But his people did go up there. They didn't go up to Alta; they only went up as far as the road went which was Red/White Pine forks. In Big Cottonwood Canyon the road went all

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the way up to what is Brighton today and they went that far and they staked some claims up there too. Connor's people, most of them were in for a three year enlistment so when their time was up most of them went home. A couple stayed on and they were the ones who really carried on the mining activities in the late 1860's. Connor stayed too by the way but most of his mining activity was west over in the Ochre's and on the other side which is why we have a Stockton in Utah now.

Joey Prokop:

Wasn't he responsible for starting Corrine?

Charles:

I don't know about that.

Joey Prokop:

Who were some of the people that really struck it big up at Alta as far as making money off of the mines? Do you know?

Charles:

In Alta? I don't know, I can't think of any that really hit it big. Not the way some people did over in Park City or some people did with the Cardiff mine in Big Cottonwood Canyon. The Emma, the guys who staked out the Emma, when they sold they did alright but I don't think they became wealthy men as a result. The local people who invested in it were the Walker brothers and I can't think of his name either, he was a banker here in town and he was the one who really exploited the Emma mine. When they started shipping ore a lot of it went west on a Central Pacific Railroad and the Union Pacific wanted to get that business. So they offered a very very good rate to ship ore east to Newark. In fact it was so good that they discovered that they could afford to ship the ore to England to be processed and that's the stories you hear about shipping Emma ore to

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England. This banker (I should know his name) Warren Hussey, he ran a bank in town. He bought the First National Bank, not the First National Bank but it was a national bank that was the first one of it's type in Utah. He bought that and he changed its name and ran it for himself and his advertisements were offering as much as 50 percent dividends. Just unbelievable, a highly successful bank for a little while. But anyway, he also invested in the Emma mine and he was the one who took over the operations and when the Union Pacific offered this good rate to ship the ore east, he exploited that, he said he wants to take out as much ore as they could. To the exclusion of everything else, all they did was hauling out ore and shipping it off east and of course this made a big splash not only in the east but also in England where people realized that this mine in Utah was shipping all this high-grade ore and that's how the mine got sold first to parties in New York who in turn sold it to the people in England and caused the big international scandal when the mine failed. Pretty much the reason why it failed was because of what Hussey did during that year when they were shipping ore to the exclusion of everything else, they were taking out everything that had been developed and not doing any exploration to find more ore. The Walker brothers and the other parties who were in on the Emma mine, they actually didn't do too well when it was sold to England because the people in New York had a contract with them telling how much they would get for their shares and they got that for their shares but the people in England were paying much much more than that per share. So they didn't do too well but Hussey did. He stuck to it and I think he did very well. Other than that I can't think of any people who really got wealthy out of it.

Joey Prokop:

It seems there was a lot of activity up there but it wasn't that big. It petered out fast and they hit a vein and then it would be that.

Charles:

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That's right and a lot of it was relatively small scale operations. Some of them like the Flagstaff were a fairly large operation but it was run by people in England too and when you've got the management a continent and ocean away, they're not in very close contact of what's going on in the mine. The Flagstaff had it's ups and downs over the years but in the long run it was probably one of the more successful mines up there.

Joey Prokop:

Do you think that if the mining activity had never happened that there would never be the skiing activity?

Charles:

I think it would have. I don't think that...well the skiing benefited from the mining in the fact that Watson turned over all the land back to the United States so the Forest Service had control of it again. But there was skiing activity over in Brighton and you didn't have that kind of scenario there. I think the skiing would have come about anyway.

Joey Prokop:

Is there any topic that I haven't touched on that you think is important as far as relating to mining history in Alta?

Charles:

No