



# The Ancient Skier

Fall 2015

## SPOKANE'S RIBLET TRAMWAYS GOT US TO THE TOP

With more than 450 Riblet chairlifts once in use, most anyone who skied in the 1960s, '70s, or '80s could say they rode a Riblet.

However, for its first 40 years, beginning in 1896, Riblet Tramways of Spokane, Wash., was a world leader in designing and building aerial tramways for mining. Skiing was in its future, but Riblet wasn't the first on the scene.

By 1936, aerial tramways and railway funiculars already were popular at select European ski resorts, and, while those types of lift systems were admired and desired by Americans, they rarely made it past the drawing table in this country. The development of such uphill conveyances required investment, hard to come by in the Depression-era economy of the 1930s.

Luckily, such development also required engineering innovation, an abundant American trait, and dedicated ski area developers. In 1935, Averell Harriman, then chairman of the Union Pacific Railroad, brought his vision of having European-like quality and character to the plans for his new Sun Valley ski resort. His development team took note and insisted on the need for "mechanical devices to take people to the top of the slides."

### Sun Valley and chairlifts: Synonymous

The Union Pacific engineers responded by devising a plan to use an overhead cable conveyance system that was based on a banana-loading lift one of its engineers, Jim Curran, had designed for the United Fruit Company. The adapted idea was that the system could carry people, instead of bananas.

With the help of American Steel and Wire Company, which had helped Dartmouth Outing Club design and build America's first J-bar lift, the two companies worked together to design and build the first chairlifts in the world at Sun Valley.

The chairlifts worked well for skiers, and reports spread about seasoned skiers getting as much as 10,000 vertical feet of skiing in one day. The success of the first chairlifts was

widely recognized that first season. Sun Valley gained exposure through the railroad's promotion efforts and also by its bringing some of the world's best ski racers to Sun Valley during that 1936-37 season to compete in an event that would later be known as the Harriman Cup.

### Riblet enters the ski market

Although Sun Valley was built during the heart of the Depression, the national economy continued to falter, and, for Riblet, that meant there were fewer investments in mining. In 1939, the company took a chance in bidding on a government-funded chairlift project at Mt. Hood's Timberline Lodge. Riblet won the bid and built the highly acclaimed "Magic Mile" single chairlift there (and, 23 years later, built its double-chair replacement).

With the Magic Mile's original design job in hand, Riblet was called upon to help design the first chairlift at the new Sugar Bowl ski resort near Donner Summit in California. That lift, rising up the mountain named after Walt Disney, the resort's largest investor, was another smashing success, which helped propel Riblet further into the ski business.

While the Spokane company did not invent the first ski chairlift, its president at the time, Carl Hansen, was clever enough to take the step to adapt Riblet's industrial tramway design services to the expanding recreational skiing market.

With Sun Valley's success, the larger ski resorts in North America began opting for chairlifts. American Steel & Wire led the charge after its success at Sun Valley and built

single chairlifts at Belknap's Gunstock development in New Hampshire, Mt. Tremblant in the Canadian Laurentians, Stowe in Vermont, and, in 1939, the first three-lift system rising to the top of Baldy at Sun Valley.

In the meantime, many local ski area operators and engineers were figuring ways to modify existing mining



*The first double chairlift in the world, a Riblet chair design, Mt. Spokane*



*Riblet's Mt. Hood Magic Mile - 1939*

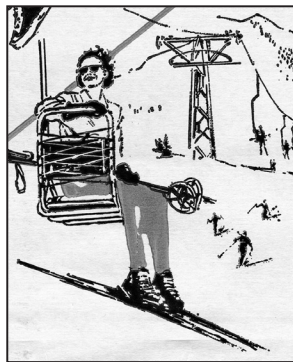
## SPOKANE'S RIBLET TRAMWAYS GOT US TO THE TOP *Continued from Page 1*

tramways for skier use by relocating them to their slopes and replacing ore buckets with chair carriers for skiers. And, so, Alta's and Aspen's first chairlifts were modified, relocated mining tramways.

Prior to World War II, a total of 18 chairlifts were built in North America, nine by American Steel & Wire, two by Riblet, and the rest by an assortment of local mining engineers and ski club enthusiasts.

### Skiing benefits from post-war boom

While the war efforts dramatically slowed the growing ski industry, the post-war boom in skiing allowed ski areas to start investing in more lifts. From the late 1940s



*Riblet's first chair featured on "Pee-Chee" folders*

through the early 1970s dozens of new ski areas were built in North America each decade. While other tramway companies got into the action, Riblet continued its steady growth by capitalizing on its earlier efforts and building high quality, innovative designs, including its unique clip system that allowed the chairs to pass smoothly over the sheave wheels at towers.

Riblet continued its innovations, notably designing the world's first double and triple chairlift systems. In 1945, the company helped the Mt. Spokane Ski Club erect Washington state's first chairlift on Mt. Spokane. Using a modified and relocated mining tramway, Riblet created a double-seat system, and the lift received considerable attention when national radio newscaster Lowell Thomas ventured out to ride it that first season.

In the same period, Riblet continued to generate more orders and designed and built single chairlifts at Mt. Hood Ski Bowl in 1946 and Ski Acres at Snoqualmie Pass (now Summit Central) in 1949. With the premier of Riblet's unique double chairlift and a follow-on double chairlift installation by Bob Heron at Berthoud Pass, Colo., the era of the single chair was waning.

### Riblet's double chairlifts spur growth

Riblet continued to improve its designs and, in the 1950s, built many ski areas' first chairlifts, particularly in the Pacific Northwest, with pivotal installations at Stevens Pass, Mt. Baker, Hoodoo Ski Bowl, and White Pass, and, later, at Crystal Mountain, Brundage Mountain, Schweitzer Basin, and Alpentel. The boom was definitely on, and Riblet started gaining footholds in more distant markets with

lift installations at Aspen in 1956 and Mammoth Mountain and Squaw Valley in 1957. Also, in 1957, Riblet built Sun Valley's first double lift and made headway into the big Eastern markets with the first lifts at the new Whiteface Mountain ski resort in New York.

The progression of increased capacity with double, triple, and, later, quad chairlifts followed the trends in skier demand for better uphill service with shorter lift lines at a time when there was increasing growth in the number of skiers.

In 1963, Riblet designed and installed the world's first triple chairlift at Boyne Highlands ski area in Michigan. Riblet also went on to develop a quad chair in the 1960s, but it was its competitor, Bob Heron, who designed and installed the first quad chair -- the very next year at Boyne Mountain, Mich.

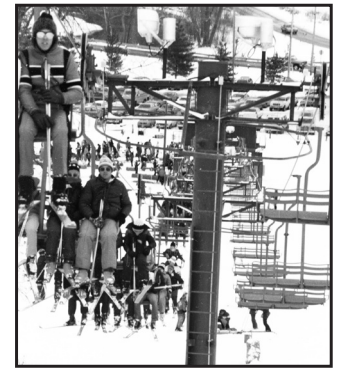
### Riblet's dominance continued

Lift installations remained at a hectic pace through the 1960s and into the 1970s, with Riblet continuing its dominance. By 1966, Ski Area Management (SAM) magazine estimated there were 1,500 ski lifts and tows operating in North America, including 489 chairlifts. Not slowing down both before and after the SAM study, Riblet took on many high profile installations: the first chairlifts up the Warm Springs side of Sun Valley's Baldy Mountain and the first chairlifts for Vail, Aspen Highlands, Snowmass, Keystone, Bachelor, Mt. Hood Meadows, Alpine Meadows, Northstar, and many others.

Then, a transition began. As chairlifts progressed from triple, to quad, to six-packs, ski areas could get more uphill capacity for just a bit more premium. In the 1980s and leading into the early 1990s, the more user-friendly (and more expensive) detachable chairlifts began to dominate the market.

During that period, Riblet continued to install lifts and to provide parts and repairs, but it never really embraced the new detachable designs. That, combined with slower growth in annual new installations, eventually led to its closing in 2003.

While Riblet Tramways no longer is in existence, many of its chairlifts still service slopes we enjoy today.



*A full chairlift gets skiers to the top on this Ohio Riblet quad lift*



*1962-Ray Tanner installs a Riblet at Ski Acres. Seattle Times Josef Scaylea photo*

## ANCIENTS GO DIGITAL

Visit our new website:

<http://www.ancientskiers.com>

### PLEASE HELP FIND NEW ANCIENT SKIERS

Whether you are reading this via email or a mailed edition, we need your help in bringing in new members.

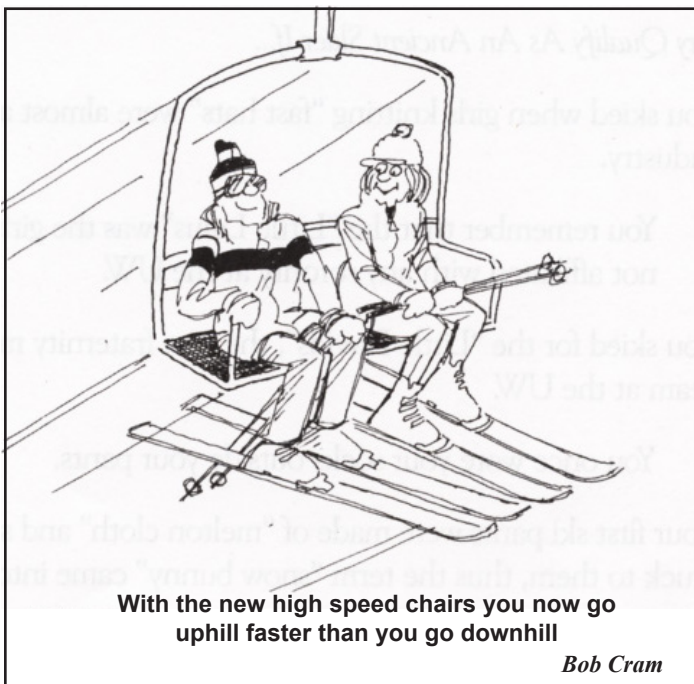
It's easy to join and members enjoy the great lift and lodging prices at our annual week in Sun Valley. We also highlight our unique Pacific Northwest skiing history in the quarterly newsletters. And our biennial Northwest Ski Hall of Fame banquet is a great place to meet new friends, find old ones, and share skiing memories.

We want new members who are long-time ski instructors, racers and organizers, ski patrollers, ski retailers and reps, ski area employees, or just seasoned recreational skiers. New members all help us with memories and new stories, volunteer for events with others, and help us enjoy our skiing legacy together.

Joining the Ancient Skiers is open to anyone over 55 years and membership is by reference. Some of the best candidate members are those like many of us who have skied in the Northwest since we were kids.

Send your skier friends and family to our website <http://www.ancientskiers.com>. From there, the Ancient Skiers application can be accessed, printed, and emailed. We also have a Facebook page. <https://www.facebook.com/AncientSkiers>. Thanks for keeping Ancient Skiers among your best group of friends.

### ANCIENT SKIERS HAVE A SPECIAL APPRECIATION FOR UPHILL TRANSPORTATION!



With the new high speed chairs you now go uphill faster than you go downhill

Bob Cram

## ANCIENT SKIERS TO CELEBRATE 33rd ANNUAL SUN VALLEY REUNION WEEK

The Sun Valley Lodge is completely renovated and the mountain staff will be ready for Ancient Skiers the week of January 16 – 23, 2016. This will be our 33rd annual reunion week and it promises to be as good as ever with top quality skiing and mingling throughout the week.



*Courtesy Sun Valley Marketing Department*

Our Sun Valley week will start with registration on Saturday, Jan. 16, 3 to 6 p.m., in the Sun Valley Inn Continental Room. You will get your packet with a name tag and a new Ancient Skiers arm badge, reunion event schedule, lift ticket information, and a free drink coupon. There also will be a no-host bar for all to enjoy while visiting other Ancients, and sign-up sheets will be available for the week's various activities.

Popular highlights will include the Monday Western dinner; world class skiing, of course; a Thursday presentation at the Opera House; and the Friday banquet in the Limelight Room capping off a wonderful week of good skiing and fun.

With this Newsletter are two forms: "REGISTRATION FORM" and "RETAIN THIS COPY FOR YOUR RECORDS." Fill out the registration form, total the event charges, and mail the completed form with your check made out to and sent to ANCIENT SKIERS, P.O. Box 1295, Sun Valley, ID 83353, postmarked no later than November 28, 2015. Please: No email responses. And be sure to copy the information from the Registration Form onto the Retain This Copy for Your Records form and bring it to the Saturday registration in case any discrepancies arise.

Those who did not book a combined package of lodging and lifts with the Sun Valley Company may purchase discounted lift tickets at the inside ticket counter at River Run Lodge. Questions? Call Marlys Gerber, (206) 271-1575, or Carol Ward, (208) 309-0168.

*E-mail, mailing addresses and telephone numbers of new members may be obtained from Membership Chair Leland Rosenlund, 425-890-5090, or at his email: [lelandr@sports-unlmt.com](mailto:lelandr@sports-unlmt.com)*

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**REMEMBERING**


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**Dick Moulton 1926 – 2015**

Dick was born on the fourth of July in Walla Walla but relocated with his family to Yakima, where he started skiing at White Pass. He not only enjoyed skiing, he made it his lifelong passion. The family moved to Tacoma, where he graduated from Stadium High School. He joined the Army Air Corps in a flight training program, but the war ended before he could use his piloting skills.

He enrolled in engineering school at the University of Washington and became an active member of the ski team and also helped in the operation of the University's Husky Winter Sports Club lodge at the east portal of the Stampede railroad tunnel.

Dick took a sabbatical from the University of Washington in the early 1950s and went to Sun Valley where he worked in a variety of jobs. His first duty was as the night watchman at the Roundhouse. He then served as a ski patrolman and instructor. In 1952, when the Lookout Bowl climax avalanche buried an instructor and two students, Dick was one of the first to begin searching (the search was unsuccessful and victims were only recovered during the spring snow melt.)

During summers, he worked with the trail crew, cutting trails on Baldy. In other interesting roles he played at Sun Valley, he doubled for Van Johnson in the "Duchess of Idaho" and took celebrity promotional photos.

He then met Virginia Anderson and came back to Seattle where he got his engineering degree and took a job with Boeing Company, working extensively in Italy. While in Seattle, he continued his skiing passion as a ski instructor and supervisor for the Fiorini Ski School. He married Virginia and had three children, Oliva, Jill and Peter.

Dick retired to Sun Valley in the mid 1980s. He became an Ancient Skier and joined the Sun Valley reunion committee. Traveling the bus to Baldy daily, he met another single, Patti Morrow, and they were married for 21 years. In the winter, they skied, and, in summers, they biked, hiked and traveled the world. Dick, with Patti's help, arranged many great programs for the Opera House après ski event during the Sun Valley reunions. Dick is survived by his wife, Patti, his children, and seven grand and great grandchildren.

**Doug Bovee 1942 – 2015**

Doug was born in Seattle to skiing parents who had him on skis at Snoqualmie Pass at age 8. He was a lifelong skier, skiing around the Northwest and, for the last 25 years, with his wife, who survives him, out of their Sun Valley condominium.

He graduated from Franklin High School in Seattle and received a degree in building construction from the University of Washington. He specialized in residential construction, building a reputation of producing high quality homes.

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**ADDITIONAL EMERITUS ANCIENT SKIERS RECOGNIZED**
**Happy 90th  
to all of you!**

*Chuck Welsh  
Lynn & Marlys Waller  
Skip Voorhees*

*Don Sandall      Chuck Howe  
Pat Nuckols      Terry Dalton  
Warren Miller    Charles Carter  
Chuck Jorgenson   Allen Benedict  
Ole Lie            Meg Barto*

**MUSEUMS MAKE PROGRESS**

The Washington State Ski and Snowboard Museum opened its doors in September, with a grand celebration on Saturday, Oct. 10, 2015. The museum, located at Snoqualmie Pass, will generally be open Wednesdays through Sundays, following the same hours as the adjoining restaurant when volunteer docents are present. The museum is set up as a non-profit organization that uses displays, combined with historical artifacts, to help showcase the rich history of skiing and snowboarding in Washington state. For more information, go to <http://www.wsssm.org>.

Based in Leavenworth, the Leavenworth Ski Hill Foundation continues its mission as a not-for-profit organization established to develop, sustain and expand Leavenworth's ski heritage. This includes support of youth and lifelong skiing; outdoor education programs; and programs that enhance Leavenworth as a recreational destination.

Current projects include the development of a Pacific Northwest Ski Museum and ice skating rink. For more information, go to <http://www.leavenworthskiheritage.org>.

Also of note is the International Ski History Association (ISHA) of which many Ancient Skiers are members. This non-profit corporation's mission is to preserve and advance the knowledge of ski history and increase public awareness of the sport's heritage. Members receive an excellent bimonthly magazine, Skiing History, and the organization sponsors an annual Ski History Week at different ski resorts each year. And there's more. For information, go to <http://www.skiinghistory.org>.

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Tina Rieman, Newsletter Design  
[tinarieman@tumwater.net](mailto:tinarieman@tumwater.net)  
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**Membership Applications & Roster Chair**

Leland Rosenlund  
19675 S.E. 24th Way, Sammamish, WA 98075  
[lelandr@sports-unlmt.com](mailto:lelandr@sports-unlmt.com) cell 425-890-5090