

# Skier Interview

## "We're in the experience business," says Chuck Lewis

Editor's note: Chuck Lewis, past president of the RMD, former Vice President and Treasurer of Vail and a powder skier of some repute, has for the last four years been the President of the new Copper Mountain development near Frisco, Colorado.

RMS: When did you originally get involved in the ski business?

Lewis: I spent some time when I was in high school and college cutting trails and running trail crews for Steve Bradley over at Winter Park—almost twenty years ago. Then I became a CPA by trade, and in the early '60s joined the Vail organization. I've been in and out of the business ever since.

RMS: What was your position with Vail, and how did you get involved with Copper Mountain?

Lewis: Vail was originally a limited partnership with about 270 partners. Pete Seibert was general manager and I was assistant general manager. When it became a corporation in early '65, I became the Executive Vice President and Treasurer. Actually I didn't come straight from Vail to Copper Mountain. I went into Denver and spent some time reorganizing a construction company there, then got into the consulting business. Copper originally came to me as a consulting client. Gradually the consulting changed into running the whole development, which I've been doing for the last four years.

RMS: What would you say are the greatest problems involved in trying to build a ski area?

Lewis: The greatest problem—at least for this area—has been trying to put together the whole financial package to make it all come true. We were out trying to raise our money during the 1970 money crunch, and when



If you mean laying out trails, I was involved in that over at Vail. And if you mean the financial and business aspects, that's something I was also exposed to over at Vail. So my actual experience was really a great number of separate experiences. Also, I'm always looking for ideas. I try to see at least 20 to 30 areas a year. And having spent some time in the construction industry, where we had from 150 to 175 houses going at the same time, it didn't take long to learn one end of a nail from the other.

RMS: Do you feel you have enough area at the bottom of the mountain to build an adequate village here?

Lewis: In our early master planning we continually tried to link the capacity of the mountain with the capacity of the base area, recognizing that a mountain does have a limitation on it. We found that the bed limit at the base must be maintained at about 5000 to 6000 in a fairly concentrated area, leaving most of the base area wide open. So when people ask us if we have sufficient base area, we always say yes, because we can build everything that the capacity of the mountain can stand and still use less than 50 per cent of the available base area land. This is the most efficient use of the land.

RMS: Does this mean that you'll have hi-rise buildings in the village?

Lewis: We figure the average height will be about 3 stories, which means that we'll have some 2-story stuff and some 10-story stuff.

RMS: Last winter the editor of one of the national ski magazines did a comparison of new Colorado areas with new French areas, and his opinion was that the French have done a much better job. How do you feel about that?

Lewis: In some ways they probably have done a better job, but at the same time some of the Europeans seem to be looking to us for new

ideas. I heard a statement once from one of the French builders, who said that you couldn't possibly have an adequate resort without a minimum of 10,000 to 14,000 beds. I don't believe that. Of course, there is a difference between the European winter vacationer and the American winter vacationer. Americans are very active, very athletic; when they go skiing, they're going to be out on the hill most of the time. They're too impatient to have a long lunch or just lie out in the sun the way the Europeans do, and they don't care for just walking around the village. But I do think that very soon you'll find quality resorts in this country that are just as good as those in Europe.

RMS: Do you think that the environmental questions have created more problems than they're worth?

Lewis: No, not at all. They've just made us more aware of what we have to do on the mountain, and they've caused us to do much more planning before we take any action. As an example, our original study permit said that we couldn't build a road on the mountain. Well, try to figure out how you develop a ski area like this without a road. It would be impossible.



But what that did for us was insure that when we came to engineering the road we were a lot more careful about placement of it. As a result, I doubt that one out of 500 people going along the highway could find any portion of that road—it's just so well tucked back into the hill. That's the answer to an environmental question, and from our standpoint it turned out to be a good answer. We're also putting in a primary-secondary-tertiary treatment plant, which is also an answer to an environmental problem, and certainly not an unreasonable answer if we're going to protect the future.

RMS: Would you mind repeating that? What does "primary-secondary-tertiary" mean?

Lewis: Basically, it just means that if the whole thing works properly, you're getting very close to being able to recycle water. With this kind of a system we laughingly say that we'll really be dumping purer water into the stream than originally came off the mountain.

RMS: It might not taste as good, though.

Lewis: Well, that's probably the biggest mental hangup, getting people to accept the fact that recycled

water is no different from the original stuff.

Getting back to that environmental question, we even tried to get our condominium developers to put in natural gas logs instead of fireplaces. I've seen mountain communities where the log smoke starts to hang in the air, and isn't a good situation at all. And really, I'm not convinced that most people would know the difference. The gas logs put out the same warmth.

RMS: Do you have any special philosophy about how you would like to run Copper Mountain?

Lewis: Well, we feel that we are really in the experience business, offering people a service. We think that we should feel privileged to serve the customer, not the other way around.

RMS: How do you feel about the cries of the environmentalists who want to preserve the wilderness as it is?

Lewis: The important thing we're doing is to provide an introduction (with comforts) to the outdoors. This gets people out who would normally never leave the cities. These are the people who, in few years, may very well be backpacking and climbing. So I think our function is very valid.

## Steamboat best site: DOOC

Reprinted from the Canyon Courier

Steamboat Springs will be the site of all Olympic jumping events, the Denver Olympic Organizing Committee announced October 20.

The Olympic luge run, planned for Genesee Park, is not the only event scheduled to be held in the Front Range of the Rockies.

The DOOC said Howelson Hill in Steamboat will be the site of the 70- and 90-meter jumps. The biathlon, Nordic and combined events will also be staged at Steamboat.

Eric Auer, DOOC director of operations, said after the study of factors such as geology, hydrology, etc. that Howelson Hill clearly stood out as the most suitable choice.

Auer said the DOOC is

"pretty much committed" to holding the luge event at Genesee Park and there are no plans for moving it. It is, he noted, the most viable site the DOOC has and time is running out to get a facility built in time for testing and practice.

The DOOC hopes to have a design for the luge run ready by early next year and actual work will begin sometime next summer. Completion will take 12-15 months

### How long in USSA?

According to a survey conducted for the USSA, 19.9 per cent of the USSA members have belonged to the organization for two years; 18.7 per cent have belonged for one year; and 10.5 per cent have belonged for over ten years.

potential sites are considered for actual development, extensive studies would have to be made to determine average snowfall, erosion factors, water supply, sewage, etc., etc. And, of course, adequate financial backing would have to be available to insure planned development.

With the 1,410,234 skiers visiting Colorado in 1966-67 mushrooming to 3,260,538 during last season, it's obvious that the sport is growing. If we are concerned with the future of the sport, with properly planned racing programs, with safety of skiers in mind, I find it difficult to understand how we can pursue a "neutral course." If we don't become involved and concentrate only on discounts and dilatoriness, we'll soon find that the "countervailing power" has been successful in forcing legislation to freeze expansion and new development. If that happens, the countervailing powers will have provided a necessary and useful function—but to whom?

## Mr. A. replies

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no expansion was even considered until we had the absolute blessing of the U.S. Forest Service and that meant submitting detailed plans of proposed construction, lift surveys, trail designs, etc. Only after approval could we move, and then under the constantly watchful eye of that man with the "Smokey Bear" hat. While the representatives from the U.S. Forest Service were always pleasant and cooperative, I was never able to detect any "benevolent neglect" on their part. Quite the contrary—they always managed to convey the firm impression that unless we listened when they talked, things like lifts, new trails, or expansion of any kind would quickly come to a screeching halt until changes were made.

The U.S. Forest Service presently has approximately 100 potential ski areas sites inventoried in the state of Colorado. Before any of these



you talk to people about ski areas during a time like that, you don't get very far. Next to money, the greatest problems have been in regard to visual impact and environment, in trying to figure out just how you're going to overcome construction problems. Luckily we've had a crew of guys around that have been innovators, and they have continually come up with good ideas.

RMS: What experience did you have prior to this in the actual building of a ski area?

Lewis: If by "building" you mean digging holes for foundations, I'd gotten some experience in that over at Winter Park. If you mean cutting timber, I've spent quite a number of years on the back end of a power saw.