

Guthega Ski Resort

– A History

Extracted from www.chrisianacapital.com

Guthega Ski Resort, as an alpine (downhill) ski destination, came about as a result of the drive and determination of Walter Spanring, an Austrian ski instructor who adopted Guthega as his home.

The first ski huts at Guthega originated from construction of the Guthega Dam, first and highest in the Snowy Mountains hydro-electric scheme. The first ski lift at Guthega was a rope tow on Tate East Ridge, installed by the SMA Ski Club in 1957 and being only a little more than 213 metres long.

It was in 1960 that Vat Paral of the YMCA Ski Club discovered Walter Spanring, who had debuted in Thredbo that year after being a championship skier in his native Austria. Walter agreed to come to Guthega, staying in Kyilla, one of the Club's two huts at Guthega. In the following year, 1961, Walter built his own hut near the dam.

In 1960-61 the YMCA Ski Club purchased Johnny Abbotts's old Smiggin Holes tow and had it completely rebuilt in Canberra by Harry Napthali. It was erected above Walter Spanring's hut at a cost of \$1,200 under Frank Juhasz's supervision. It was hired to and operated by Walter Spanring in 1961 and operated by the YMCA Ski Club in subsequent years up to 1964. The SMA tow hut burnt down in 1965 and a syndicate headed by Walter Spanring decided to erect a new T-bar on the Western slope of Mt Blue Calf. This new lift was supplied by Poma (Pomagalski SA) and was completed by the middle of 1965. The YMCA's beginners' tow was sold to Walter in 1966 (for \$140). Walter also subsequently built and operated the Guthega Hotel with his wife Hannelore and with brother-in-law Hans Eberstaller (Senior) as an investor.

While designing the Australian Ski Club in 1974, Peter Aynsley met Walter Spanring and was asked by Walter to obtain approvals from the National Parks & Wildlife Service ("NPWS") for new ski lifts and slope amenities. At the time the new plans were formulated in 1975, there were still only two ski lifts at Guthega - the Poma T-bar on Mt Blue Calf and the ageing rope tow

above the hut near Guthega Dam. By this time Walter had also installed lights to the rope tow and offered night skiing for the dedicated. Photos of the facilities in 1975 are below:



Blue Calf kiosk and storage



Blue Calf Ticket Office



Waiting for the Blue Calf lift



Original Poma T-Bar on Mt Blue Calf



Rope tow above Walter's hut



Rope tow, Guthega Dam in background

Central to Walter Spanring's vision was obtaining rights to a new ski lift from an area known as "the saddle" to near the summit of Mt Blue Cow. Peter therefore prepared plans that provided for:

- A new ski lift to Mt Blue Cow;
- A new lift to the South of the saddle area, known as "Cowpastures";
- Replacement of the existing rope tow; and
- A new amenities building at the base of the Mt Blue Calf lift.

The NPWS approved the plans, but then came the next problem - funding. A number of the existing Guthega ski clubs provided some of the funds as loans, with Walter Spanring's Guthega Developments Pty Ltd finding the balance. Walter and Peter travelled to Mt Buller to meet Hans Grimus, negotiating purchase of Buller's old Boggy Creek T-bar. Most of this T-bar - an Australian-designed, diesel-powered, hydraulic ski lift - was re-used to construct the Mt Blue Cow T-bar. John Delprado, the engineer who had worked on the Australian Ski Club, engineered re-use of much of the structure and towers. Guthega regulars from that era will recall the orange "upside down U" towers that

had to be routinely dug out in heavy snow.

Two new rope tows - one to replace the old rope tow above Walter's hut and one to serve the Cowpastures area - were purchased from Max Bruckschloegl in Austria (www.skilifts.eu) and installed for the 1976 ski season.

The following are some photos from this time:



Vintage Unimog, backbone of the Guthega fleet. (left to right: Peter Aynsley, Swiss Tony and Walter Spanring) Guthega Hotel in background



Construction underway in saddle area. Lift line cleared to top of Mt Blue Cow T-bar. Construction commenced to lift hut at base housing diesel motor and hydraulics



Boggy Creek lift before relocation



Blue Cow lift motor room hut construction

designed by Peter Aynsley, was constructed largely by tradesmen who were Guthega regulars and members of the Guthega Ski Club. Long-time GSC member Kurt Masur claimed that in future people would stand testimony to his feat of installing the largest sheet of seamless gyprock ceiling in the world!



Blue Calf Amenities Building



Footings for Blue Cow base hut



Entrance to Amenities Building



Work on Blue Cow base hut



Amenities to right, Blue Calf Lift to left

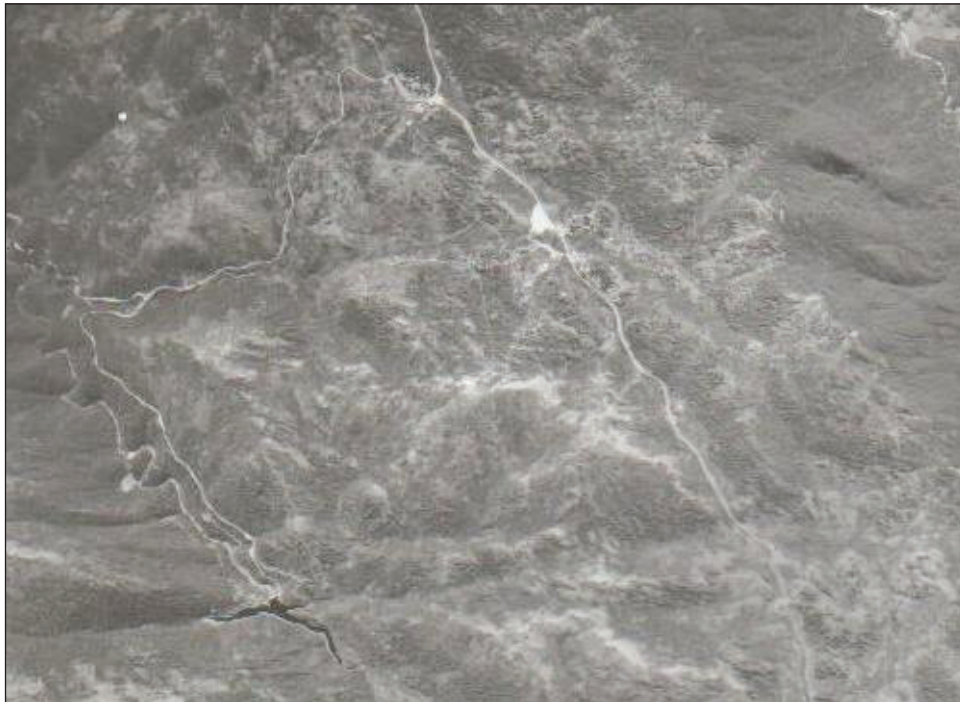
Limited capital, combined with mountain conditions, made construction a serious challenge. All lift footings were mixed on site and poured by hand - a far cry from the helicopters used in the next stage of development. It was only Walter Spanring's hard work and dogged determination - with one full-time helper and club volunteers - that led to completion and commissioning of the lifts.

Guthega Developments also found funds to complete the new Amenities Building at the base of the Blue Calf T-bar. This building, also



New Building to left, old Ticket Office to right

Adult Day Tickets in the first season the Blue Cow lift operated were \$9.50 (low season), \$10 (high season - 15 July to 30 September). Group ski lessons were \$7 for two hours and private ski lessons were \$12 per hour. You could even buy a single ride on a T-bar for 80 cents.



Guthega, The Smiggin Holes and Perisher in January 1979

Unfortunately, hard work and determination can only go so far - ski resorts in the development stage require ongoing capital. In 1980 Walter sold 75% of the resort to three Sydney-based investors and remained at the resort to see the development proceed to its next stage. The new investment capital allowed new facilities at Guthega over the period 1981-1983, including:

- A new chairlift from the carpark area up to the saddle;
- Carparking expanded through creation of roadside parking bays;
- Replacement of the old Mt Blue Cow T-bar with a new high-speed T-bar;
- Replacement of the Mt Blue Calf Poma T-bar with new parallel twin T-bars;
- Replacement of the Cowpastures rope tow with a new J-bar lift;
- Re-use of the Cowpastures Rope Tow as a beginner's lift in the saddle, parallel with the Blue Cow T-bar;
- Extensive slope grooming to create a new network of ski runs - three of which ultimately achieved f.i.s. accreditation and held international events for Slalom and Giant Slalom;

- Expansion of the Blue Calf amenities building;
- A new Ski Centre at the base of the new Chairlift; and
- Extensions to the Guthega Lodge/Guthega Hotel (now Guthega Alpine)

Gunter Krohn of Alpkrohn Engineering, who had constructed the vast majority of ski lifts in NSW, was commissioned to supply and build all the new Doppelmayr ski lifts (www.doppelmayr.com). Peter Aynsley designed the new buildings, obtained approvals for all resort components (including buildings; chairlift, T-bars and J-bar; roads/parking/services infrastructure; and ski runs/slope grooming) and managed the overall development.

Karl Guenther completed construction of the Ski Centre and in addition became Outdoor Manager. Karl created many of the new ski runs in summer and managed their grooming in winter, working hand-in-hand in winter with Lifts Manager Peter Schranz. New lifts and ski runs were operational for the 1981/82 ski seasons, together with an expanded Blue Calf amenities building. The carpark Ski Centre was completed and operational for the 1983 ski season. [Click here for details of the 1983 Ski Season launch](#), remembered by many for the snow bunnies

from Australian Playboy and Cold Chisel in concert for Guthega's Playboy grand final as much as for the great season of ski events.

The following are photos from 1982 and 1983:



Carpark Ski Centre and base of chairlift at right.
Bottom of f.i.s. Giant Slalom to left.



Karl Guenther



Closer view of Ski Centre and Chairlift bottom station



Top station of twin Blue Calf T-bars and Chairlift top station in bottom-right



New Blue Cow T-bar - Blue Calf top station in mid-ground
and views to main range beyond



Saddle area, food service adjacent Chairlift top station -
beginners' rope tow and Blue Cow T-bar beyond



Completed ski centre



Ski Centre interior, café level



Hazards of roadside parking, Ski Centre in rear



Extended Blue Calf amenities building



Ski Centre - mid-section of "Parachute" f.i.s. Giant Slalom visible above