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## Max Dercum

Born: 1912

Information submitted by I. William Berry in a nomination letter to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame

*Max Dercum was one of seven founders of the Professional Ski Instructors of America, and as a member authored the book "The Official American Ski Technique."*

Max Dercum is the Pied Piper who lured the beginner, the gentle instructor when arrogance was the rule of the slope, the dreamer who foresaw in the 1960s that Keystone would not only be a fine ski mountain but would anchor one of the most important ski resorts in the country – a resort that would incorporate not only Keystone by Arapahoe Basin, a major convention center, tennis camp, a lake and, most of all, embody the future of American skiing without losing its past. Keystone Resort renamed its original ski area Dercum Mountain for its founder, Max during the summer of 2004.

Max, when he joined the world of skiing in the 1930s, brought a formal education with him: a degree in forestry from Cornell University (where he was a member of the first ski team), the University of California (where he also taught skiing), and Penn State, where as an assistant professor of forestry he found time to form and coach the first college racing team.

Whether this essentially peripheral contact with skiing would have expanded on its own is moot. In 1937-38, the Pennsylvania Railroad contacted him to consult in designing an area. He took a leave of absence from Penn State to tour Europe to study how areas were designed there – and even though he returned to the Penn State Forestry faculty, it was obviously just a matter of time until he hit the ski-area business fulltime.

That seemed to happen in 1940-41 when he first came to Colorado and found what was later to become A-Basin and SkiTip Ranch. When the war broke out he headed out to Washington State for an essential-industry position in logging. After the war ended, it was back to Colorado, where, working with such greats as Dick Durrance, Larry Jump, Thor Groszold, and Sandy Schaeffler, he put together the A-Basin (Arapahoe Basin).

For most people, that would have been sufficient, especially since Max was also building SkiTip Lodge at that same time and breaking new ground in teaching. "But all that time," he says, "Keystone was just sitting there waiting to be developed. It was just a matter of time." In the early 1960s, Max got a three-year U.S.F.S. permit, built the models and began to hit the road-show circuit to entice a large corporate sponsor: Earlier than most, he knew that the shoe-string methods of the 1940s, under which he built A-Basin, would not work in the 1970s. In time, he attracted Ralston-Purina, and they went along for half the money with only one proviso: "Give us a way to get our Iowa wives from the top to the bottom." Max designed Schoolmarm, Keystone, which today is the keystone of Summit County, Colorado, and it was launched. Max Dercum's career was capped.

Max Dercum's skiing career also included being one of the seven Founding Directors of the Professional Ski Instructors of America (PSIA) in 1961, in Big Mountain, Montana. As a Master Racer, Max won many trophies during the 1980s through the 1990s in Italy, Spain, France, Austria, Switzerland, and the USA.

Max Dercum was elected to the NASTAR Ski Hall of Fame (1975), Colorado Ski Hall of Fame (1980), and the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame (1983).



Photo by Andrea Tindal  
Max Dercum, Dillon Co.  
1983 Subaru Masters