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Rudolph F. (Rudi) Mattesich

Born: 1900 Died: 1995

Rudi Mattesich, perhaps more than any other single individual, was responsible for the introduction, development, and growth of ski touring in the United States.

Born in 1900 in Bosnia, Yugoslavia, then part of the Austrian Empire, educated in military schools, graduated from the Austria-Hungarian Imperial Military Academy and commissioned as a lieutenant, Rudi Mattesich served with the Hungarian white army after World War I. In the manner of the day, he was exposed to the arts and undertook formal training as a painter.

In 1921, Rudi went to work in the Austrian Tourist Office in Vienna, spending his winter holidays trail skiing in the Austrian Alps with little money, old army equipment and not much technique. During this time, he became acquainted with people involved in skiing, including Hannes Schneider, who was developing, during the war, a skiing technique to enable soldiers with packs to cope with different terrain. In 1926, Austria was ready to promote skiing in the Tyrol and Arlberg and Rudi was chosen for the job of convincing Americans of its superiority. From 1926 until 1938, he ran the Austrian National Tourist Office on New York's Fifth Avenue. It was during those years that Rudi met many of the people influential in skiing. In 1932, Vienna was pushing hard for American tourists. Rudi convinced one of Austria's renowned racers, Hannes Schroll, to enter some of our races in order to assist that promotion. That was the beginning. Rudi had met Hannes Schneider in Austria, and in 1936, persuaded him to come with his Arlberg team to spread the word in meets and ski shows. Old timers well remember the impact made by those New York Madison Square Garden and Boston Garden shows and the giant step forward that skiing took as a result of publicity generated by the likes of Otto Schneibs, Benno Rybyzka, Otto Lang, and Sigi Buchmayr. Rudi was a moving force behind all this.

In 1938, Austria was absorbed by Hitler's Third Reich and Rudi sadly left the Tourist Office. During the war years, Rudi lived in New York's Greenwich Village and, among other things, worked as a comptroller in the Astor Hotel and the Belmont Plaza. Mainly he painted while his wife, Virginia, an accomplished author, wrote. Most of their output sold.

When the war ended, Rudi spent most of his time endeavoring to help post-war Austria. He organized and headed the official relief organization for Austria "American Relief for Austria" in 1945-47. He was also doing some skiing with his compatriot, Sepp Ruschp at Stowe. He was increasingly reverting to ski touring, which seemed, to him, to be more natural. Austria, in 1947 called on Rudi Mattesich to reopen the Austrian National Tourist Office in New York, to, again promote skiing in Austria.

In 1951-52 with Sepp Ruschp's help, he financed the first F.I.S. team to come here. Skiing both downhill and trails at Stowe with Sepp, the beauty of the woods on the mountain recalled the joy of earlier trail skiing in Austria. He, himself, did increasingly more ski touring in an effort to get back closer to nature. He like his first friend Jack Rabbit Johannsen, believed in keeping it simple and inexpensive.

With Ron MacKenzie, of Lake Placid, he helped lay out the Mt. Hoevenberg trails. In August, 1962, Rudi remembering the good old days in Austria, was set to revive trail skiing. In November, 1962 he called Roland Palmedo and discussed plans to foster ski touring. That month, they organized the Ski Touring Council with Rudi as president. The Ski Touring Council, through Rudi, published the *Ski Touring Guide*, a detailed listing and description of touring trails in the eastern U.S. Canada and parts of Western U.S.

In 1969, Rudi retired from the Tourist Office but not from his involvement with ski touring. He moved to Vermont and was busier than ever with the Ski Touring Council. For his many years of dedication and quiet devotion, Rudi has received a number of awards. Among them are the National Ski Touring Area Operators Award, the 1976 Golden Quill Award from the U.S. Ski Writers Association for outstanding contributions to American Skiing and the 1974 COMNIE Award from the Association of Travel Editors. He has received two Gold Certificates from the Eastern Ski Association of which he is a long-term member and a special award from the National Ski Touring Instructors. The National Ski Patrol has made him an honorary member.

Rudi Mattesich was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1983.