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Benno Rybizka

Born: 1904 Died: ?

Taken from a short biography written by Allen Adler

The Hannes Schneider Ski School was well established in the early 1930s in St. Anton and Benno Rybizka was second in command. The Arlberg Technique had been Schneider's brainchild and had become the accepted style of turning skis – a far departure from the old nordic telemark technique.

On February 11, 1939, Hannes Schneider stepped off the train in North Conway, New Hampshire. Greeting him, along with Harvey Gibson, who had gained his release from the Nazis, was Benno Rybizka. The local youngsters formed an archway of skis.

Benno had been Hannes' right hand at the renowned ski school in St. Anton. In 1936, he had come to America at the request of Carroll Reed to establish the first branch of the Hannes Schneider Ski School in this country. Eight local boys were recruited to assist in this endeavor at Whitney's, in Jackson, New Hampshire. Tyler Micoleau wrote, in the 1937-38 *American Ski Annual*, a most engaging account of that first year's tribulations on icy crust and frozen apples. Benno took several of his tyro instructors back to St. Anton with him in 1937, where, after a month of special instruction, they passed the Austrian Instructor's test administered by Professor Kruckenhauser. Later that year, Benno opened the second branch of the Hannes Schneider Ski School at Cranmore Mountain at North Conway. He brought Franz Koessler over from St. Anton to run the Jackson branch. Toni Matt and Otto Tschol, also from St. Anton, were brought here in the 1938-39 season, Tschol going to Jackson and Matt to North Conway. Then, in 1939, the great man himself, Hannes Schneider, arrived to oversee the schools already established by Benno Rybizka. Those years saw the flood tide of the Austrian invasion and the "bend ze knees," "shtem like hell," rope tow and \$1.50 guesthouse room days that for so long left its happy stamp on our sport.

In 1942, Joe Ryan enticed Benno to Mt. Tremblant in the Canadian Laurentians where he directed the ski school until 1946. After that, bits and pieces of reports found Benno at Lake Placid and St. Adele, P.Q. All of the above was well documented. Then the trail petered out. I, the writer, had known of Benno from my early skiing days. As a sometime ski historian retired to Vermont, I occasionally wondered what had become of older ski areas, lodges and people who had given them life. While researching the Kate Peckett story, I visited Jackson and North Conway. Otto Tschol and Betty Whitney were still in residence. But nothing on Benno. The unsettling jolt was in realizing that only a few old-timers even knew of Benno Rybizka. His peers and contemporaries, Schneider, Matt, Schniebs, Lang, Buchmayr, Foeger, Schroll, etc., are all historically accounted for and most of them are National Hall of Famers. And, yet, Benno Rybizka is scarcely remembered.

Don Metivier, editor of *Ski Racing*, kindly ran a blurb for me asking for information about Benno Rybizka. The response was immediate and heart-warming. Telephone calls and letters came from all over the country: Luggi Foeger, Dixi Nohl, Rick Henry, Friedl Pfeiffer's stepson, and many old friends and ex-students of Benno's, including a 30-year old, inscribed photo of Benno and his wife (then) Blanche. Also, my first real knowledge that he was still alive and living in St. Anton. I wrote to Benno and received a warm and gracious letter in return. He filled in all the blank spaces in my history of his activities in this country. After leaving Mt. Tremblant in 1946, he headed up the ski schools at Portillo, Chile; St. Adele, P.Q.; Mittersill, New Hampshire; Mt. Tremblant again and, finally, the Lake Placid Club. In 1953, Benno's father died, leaving his house and Benno's 86-year old stepmother to be cared for. Benno returned to St. Anton for good in 1954 where he still skied, although, as he said, in a "rather harmless way."

Benno Rybizka was truly a giant among the pioneers of American skiing. They were a hardy breed and it is a tribute to their innate toughness that so many survive today. It seems a shame that, of them all, Benno seems to have become the forgotten man. If I have been able, even in a small way, to revive some fond memories of Benno Rybizka, it is only what he has earned for his contributions in shaping our sport. Ski heil, Benno!

Benno Rybizka was elected to the National Ski Hall of Fame in 1991.

