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Walter Foeger

Born: 1917

Nov. 30

Died: Feb 10,
2007

What Walter Foeger saw at the foot of Jay Peak, Vermont, in December 1956, would have discouraged the average skier. After all he was hired and brought to America to start a ski school and so far the new resort had only one bulldozed trail cut half way up the slope, a poma lift yet to be installed, and a CCC barracks built in the 1930s for a base lodge. But this 39 year old enterprising Austrian knew he was in the right place at the right time. He was determined to revolutionize the way people learn to ski, and now he had the mountain to do it.

Foeger was born in Innsbruck in 1917 but struggling to make ends meet after World War One, his family soon moved to Kitzbuhel. He got his first pair of skis when he was ten and by the time he was thirteen he won the Tyrolean Youth Ski Championship, a title he defended for three years in a row. In 1936 he won the junior combined Hahnenkamm and in 1937 was picked for the Austrian National Team.

War interrupted Foeger's ski racing career, but in 1945 he was back on the slopes and co-founded the Austrian Ski Association serving as director. The next year he was chosen to coach the Spanish National Team and he guided them to the 1952 Olympics.

On his own and out of Austria, he experimented with ski techniques so when the job at Jay Peak beckoned him to a new continent, he was ready to make his mark.

Once in Vermont, Foeger did whatever it took to make his dream come true. First, he cleared the Sweetheart Trail to make a beginner run. Then he sold tickets, hot dogs, groomed the slopes with a hand-towed roller, and taught classes of up to 50 beginners all the while promoting his Natur Teknik promising skiers an easier way to learn parallel turns.

In 1958 he wrote "Learn to Ski in a Week," and students came in droves from as far away as Pennsylvania and Ontario to test his theory. What better way to entice skiers to rent rooms for a week rather than a weekend and at the same time build the rural Vermont economy?

To accommodate the new crowds, Foeger had to cut more runs and add more lifts. So deep was his commitment to grow Jay Peak that in 1960 he relinquished his salary so the company could finance a new chairlift. A grateful corporation made Foeger General Manager.

By 1967, he had totally transformed the mountain adding an 8500 foot cable car, 3 chairlifts, 3 T-bars, a pomalift, 45 trails, snowmaking, night skiing, mountain top restaurant, slope side condominiums and an Austrian-style hotel under construction. Plus, he chartered 14 Natur Teknik Schools in the U.S. and Canada. By the end of the 1970s, Foeger's ski schools had introduced some 150,000 skiers to the sport.

When ownership changed at Jay Peak, so did Foeger's opportunities to spread his ski technique world wide. He left in 1968 and in 1973 returned to Austria to direct the country's Tennis Association, a job he held until retiring in 1982.

Walter Foeger was elected to the National Ski Hall of Fame in 2005.

