

The first skiers



Stefan Kruckenhauser instructing in 1930.

It did not take long until the first skiers discovered the Arlberg and started careering down the snow covered slopes. **In the winter of 1895 the parish priest of Lech made his first attempt at skiing.** Despite local amusement, he was soon able to convince others, too, that this new sport had a future. At the same time **Mathias Zdarsky was developing the Lilienfeld skiing technique in Lower Austria.** Unlike the Norwegian method, his technique involved leaning forward. Slowly, the sport was taken up throughout the Arlberg area. **On 10th December, 1899 Hermann Hartmann climbed the Galzig for the first time on skis.** Setting off from St. Anton via St. Christoph, he reached the peak in a little over 3 ½ hours, a very respectable time even by today's standards. Back in the hospice, he proudly recorded his achievement in the visitors' book.

Apart from Hartmann, the other Arlberg pioneers of skiing included **Professor Karl Gruber, Max Madlener, Josef Ostler, Oswald Trojer, the landlord of the hospice, and Viktor Sohm.** The young locals were much impressed by these "peak baggers" and many a lad tried to make his own skis. **Hannes Schneider** was among them, he fashioned his first skis from a sledge maker's scraps and a sieve which he nailed on to the runners as abinding. Later, he himself recounted how he had practised on these skis, frequently by moonlight and well into the night, wishing to avoid ridicule by his shool chums. At the age of 13, he was given his first "real" skis by **Professor Weiser, the chairman of the Ulm section of the Alpine Club.**

On Christmas Day of 1900 a group of friends decided to undertake a ski tour to St. Christoph and on 3rd January, 1901 they put their plan into action. The weather was glorious, the snow superb and in the evening at the hospice inn the wine flowed. **The friends made a historic decision and the Arlberg Ski Club was born.** On that very evening the club emblem was devised and added to the deed of foundation: two crossed skis and a ski pole. It has remained the same ever since.

No mere momentary whim, the Arlberg Ski Club became a permanent institution. A love of skiing was what the members had in common. They gave admirable encouragement to ski tourism and to skiing races. More and more enthusiasts came to the Arlberg and within five years the number of members had reached 147 (!). **In March 1902 Professor W. Paulke and Karl Gruber held the first mountain guide ski course, the culmination of which was a tour up to the Valluga.** Paulke and Gruber recorded this in writing, noting the participants' names and mentioning that they had removed their skis some 100 m. below the peak, covering the remaining 100 m. on foot. The view was superb, the descent and the snow left nothing to be desired.

In January 1903 the Club held its first internal races, among the winners was Hannes Schneider of Stuben, not yet 13 years' old at the time. The first open Arlberg races were announced for March of the same year. A great number of nominations were received in St. Anton, but the weather proved to be unkind and the event had to be cancelled. It was held in the following year, however, the programm comprising a long distance race and a fast race, a ladies' event and a juniors' race. The interest was great: greetings telegrams were received from other ski clubs and skiing enthusiasts as well as from Archduke Eugen. General satisfaction was expressed, the SCA had shown that it really was helping to promote Alpine skiing.



The finish at the Second Skiing Race in St. Anton in 1905.

The Club also helped to arouse more local understanding for skiing and regarded one of its tasks as "welcoming visitors to St. Anton", assisting them, providing a friendly and sociable setting for their sport and ensuring that the population welcomes skiers, setting them goodwill and understanding. In 1906 when Adolf Gerstel, the chairman at that time, reviewed the Clubs's first six years, he remarked, **"The economic benefits thanks to this increased winter tourism in our indigent mountain valleys should not be overlooked"**.