



History- Review

Snow shoes in today's sense as a means against sinking in is described by the Greek Xenophon as early as around 400 BC among the Armenians. "They had sacks tied around the horses' hooves, because otherwise they would sink in up to their bellies in the snow." In the far north of Eurasia, three types of skis developed:

1. a Nordic-Arctic type from northern Russia and Siberia: Both skis are the same length and are used as gliding skis.
2. a Nordic-Scandinavian type: these skis are not the same length. The left one measures up to 3.20m and has a guide groove in the middle, the right one with 2.40m is used for push-off.
3. a midland type: Both skis are again the same length, have no guide groove, but in the middle of the top a recess for the shoes.



These three types have then evolved over the centuries into our current ski forms. The old skis were often bent up at both ends, and a strip of fur served as a binding. The Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus mentions the use of skis by the Finns as a tool for hunting and "to climb otherwise inaccessible mountains and get where they want on serpentine winding paths."



In 1450 there are already marked ski trails for Norwegian couriers and the first ski races testifies Bishop Olaf Magnus of Uppsala. When? 1555 was this significant date. By the end of the 17th century, skis had made their way to Central Europe. Richard Valvasor tells us in 1689 that the farmers Krain had "a rare invention which no one has yet seen, that of going down a high mountain with incredible speed when the snow is on the ground." How? Well, with "Brettln" of 1.50m bent up in front and behind. The peasants, "flew down with it, a strong stick under the armpit, down the toughest mountains, skillfully avoiding any tree or stone rock." Variant riders in the Baroque era? I'm just quoting the passage and can't quite believe it myself. Mountain farmers probably have other things to do even in winter than to "fly down" over the mountains. In any case, we now hear nothing more about skiing until the end of the 19th century. Perhaps the invention of the Krainer farmers was only 200 years too early. Around 1879 ski jumping starts in the Norwegian landscape Telemarken and in 1890 the famous polar explorer Fridtjof Nansen crosses Greenland on skis, about which he then writes a book. The ski becomes a sporting device in those areas where it can be used with some prospect of snow. The relatively short period of the pioneers begins. In Austria, for example, the Styrians Kleinoschegg and Schruf, the Vorarlberg Sohm, in Germany Prof. Paulcke. In Germany the first ski club is also founded in 1891, in 1892 the "Association of Styrian Skiers" and the "Austrian Ski Club". In the Giant Mountains, in the Harz Mountains, in the Thuringian Forest and in the Ore Mountains people start skiing. And on the Arlberg, of course.

About a hundred years separate us from the beginning of skiing as a sporting activity, no more. The same is true of sport as such: sport practiced for its own sake. Gymnastics was invented only 190 years ago. The "gymnastics father" Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, founder of gymnastics, was not concerned with something purposeless; he derived "gymnastics" from "tournament" as a preliminary form of combat; his "physical exercises" were intended to make German youth tough and able to defend themselves for the fight against Napoleon.



The idea of performing any physical activity without benefit or piety was completely alien to the Middle Ages. Not even hunting, the practice of which was reserved for the nobility and had sporting features, existed without purpose: the hunted animals were eaten as a matter of course, and the manorial household was supplied with the spoils of the hunt. It is only in the last century that the great change begins: People start doing things that would have been considered crazy - if not suicidal - just a few generations before. They climb mountains (where they absolutely do not belong), they explore remote areas of the earth (masking the sporting challenge with scientific interest) - and they increase the insanity by moving the climbing to winter!

Hermann Hartmann, December 10, 1899, entry in the tourist book of St. Christoph: "With snowshoes from St. Anton to St. Christoph in 1 1/2 hours, from St. Christoph to the Galzigspitze (2185m) in 2hrs. 10min., downhill in 18min., snow height 0.68m to 1.60m - magnificent panoramic view!"

Four lines, but in this succinct entry of the customs officer from Lindau, which has become famous, the paradigm shift at the end of the 19th century can be read in every detail and I think we should do the same. Because if we want to know where we are, we have to know where we come from.

With snowshoes from St. Anton to St. Christoph in 1 ½ hours...: in any case much faster than without snowshoes. Perhaps it would not have been possible without the planks - despite the existence of a road. But then on the Galzig - with certainly no existing road. What is it about? About conquest, there's no other way to put it. Hartmann goes where no one went before. It may be that the Galzig was already climbed in summer. That's something different than now in winter. December 1899, under impossible conditions. The key word is mastery of space.



Walking there and then, where and when one couldn't walk before. Progress in the literal sense. Progress does not always have to be associated with the roar of machines and steaming chimneys, or with humming wires and flashing electric coils - after all, that's what we think of when we hear this term in the 19th century.

Progress can also be associated with Hermann Hartmann's panting breath and the grinding sound of his skis. The world he sees is entirely new and unseen. Progress on the threshold of the century is a reorientation in the mind. Snow height 0.68m to 1.60m: Of course, the measuring and calculating modernity must also be there, the engineering - one must imagine: How does he know the snow depth to the centimeter? 0.68m - that's not estimated, that's measured. So he took a pocket rule with him, a measuring device. He took it with him, knowing that there would be something to measure. Snow depth. Why on earth would you take a pocket rule with you on a ski tour? Who cares about the snow depth on the Galzig on December 10, 1899? Hermann Hartmann cares, and so do all those of his ilk. The data collectors. The fact-finders. Knowledge is better than ignorance. Credo of the modern age. It's true: the modern thirst for knowledge is itself a little embarrassing. After all, it's ridiculous: What power would arise from knowledge of the snow depth on the Galzig? No, it must be said: Knowledge is good. Knowledge is up to date. That is the strong, unquestionable basic assumption of the era. But that's not why anyone works their way up such a high mountain. With skis in early winter. But because of the last, all-important point:

...magnificent panoramic view! It is achieved. "Magnificent panorama" explains everything. Tolerates everything, believes everything, hopes everything. "Magnificent panorama" is the ultimate justification of all alpinistic, space-conquering effort. Only a metaphor. For something that one never dares to say out loud. For the last, outermost, highest, for a fusion with the universe through contemplation of the same!



One will object that I exaggerate these things, exaggerate them, give them an almost religious touch.... But I believe that they can no longer be exaggerated, they are so inscribed in minds and hearts...

During preliminary discussions about this book, I asked journalists the simple question: Why do people actually ski? Answer: Because it is so beautiful. Agreed, I said, I'll take your word for it, but what's so beautiful about it? "When you ski over such an untouched deep snow slope, it's a feeling as if you ... as if you're gliding a cloud dream..."

That was about the first thing I heard when asked about the beauty of skiing - after not half a minute of thought. "Gliding through a cloud dream." So a movement through the sky - through a heavenly sky. Actually, only the chubby-cheeked baroque angels are missing. This nevertheless very impressive picture came from a person who, due to his profession, tends rather to cynicism than to rapturous love of nature. In general, this "rapturousness" that stereotypically comes to mind when non-skiers talk about skiing enthusiasm is quite misleading. "Gushing" is what young girls do: there's something immature, slightly crazy, but harmless about it - "it gives itself with the time." Behind the term "gushing" is defense of the very different, which is darkly sensed, not understood, but feared. Skiing does not "give itself with the time" - on the contrary. It only really begins. For example, with Hermann Hartmann on the Galzig. And he was not the only one: In February 1895, Paul Martin, a trainee at the railroad workshop in Lindau, made a ski tour to Valfagehr, a second one over the snow-covered Arlberg to St. Anton. In February 1896 he undertakes a tour with the legal trainee Färber via Zürs, Lech and Warth to Lechleiten, then on to Oberstdorf. Despite the great danger of avalanches, everything goes well, three passes are crossed: Arlbergpass, Flexenpass and Schrofenpass.

We find ourselves in the mystical splendor of the founding era. The participants do not know it yet, but each of their ideas becomes a significant first time, something historically unheard



of, unprecedented. Everything they do is completely new. In 1899 Viktor Sohm, Hermann Hartmann, Josef Ostler and the factory owner Julius Rhomberg climb from St. Anton up to St. Christoph. On the way they meet the hospice innkeeper Oswald Trojer. Trojer has no skis, he doesn't know any either and is surprised. That soon changes. The hospice is an important place in the white wasteland of the Arlberg. Within a few years, the wasteland becomes a paradise. Because of the skis. And with skis. St. Christoph becomes the starting point for ski tours. Trojer and his daughter Liesl take part, become pioneers of tourism. A mysterious historical process begins, a kind of historical alchemy, a revaluation of values: What was bad on the Arlberg now becomes good. The solitude, the high altitude, the impassability. The landscape is still the same. But it is no longer the same. A question of perception: It is now, around 1900, a different view that falls on the Arlberg than a few decades before. Now the eyes shine.

Before, you turned away in fear. Before, the lonely glistening of snow-bearing mountains meant death. Banal and concrete: death by starvation. Now it is called magnificent panorama or "...as if you were gliding through a dream of clouds..." so, significantly, it is still called today. A strange process: like the change of the photographic negative into the positive. Black becomes white and vice versa. One is often tempted to pin the error, this turnaround, the reversal, on the technical object that makes this possible in the first place, the ski. Of course, the other experience of nature is not even conceivable without skis. Skis are necessary, but not sufficient. A radically different conception of nature must be added: Nature - probably dangerous, but controllable. Nature - not as existentially different, but as an experienceable counterpart. In other words, anyone who is shaken by fear at the mere sight of the snow-covered Galzigspitze, like the man of the Middle Ages, will not climb up there - not even with the best skis and the most modern alpine equipment. After all, what's the point of just getting to a place more quickly that is populated by demons?



In a similar context, the legend of the condemned robber and murderer to whom the notables make the offer to climb the Blocksberg on Walpurgis Night also illuminates this: He should then tell what he has experienced there and is a free man. The robber-murderer scornfully refused the offer and preferred to be executed in an unpleasant way than to set foot on the Blocksberg. No man in his right mind goes to the annual general meeting of hell. The Galzigspitze is not the Blocksberg, but the man of the Middle Ages does not climb mountains, certainly not in winter. We summarize the important landmarks of the change:

Mastery of space

Snow height

From... to... in ... hours, minutes seconds

Magnificent panorama

These few terms already contain everything that is to come. If you think about them further and take them as symbols, you can easily deduce later developments. From "mastery of space" the key term development and everything that has to do with ropeways and infrastructure.

"Snow depth" stands for weather caprices, centennial division into early winters, into late, good and bad, into seasons, stands for the fundamental nature-bound nature of skiing and the tourism attached to it. Skiing as a tourist business is something like agriculture. In the past it was the summer that fed people, now it is the winter. Landscape use - the one like the other. The whining is also similar: just as there is no such thing as an ideal year for the farmer, neither does one exist for the hotelier. "The season was actually quite good, but ..." Never have I heard a member of these professions break out in jubilation. Even with the best course of events, there is at least one fly in the ointment; the ideal year, in which everything really fits, does not seem to exist, not in decades or centuries. The rest of the population does not understand this and considers farmers and hoteliers to be chronically dissatisfied, even greedy people. Nonsense! Do not be blinded by the popular prejudice! Any folklorist will tell you that this kind of complaining is a simple defensive spell that has been practiced for many generations and has become second nature to both alpine and farming people: those who exuberantly praise



their situation arouse the envy of those dark forces mentioned above. Of course, they no longer skin the cheeky invader of their realm to nail them to the roof of the alpine hut, as some "Bütze" used to do. It is enough if they tear a hole in the balance sheet by a botched season. The bank then takes care of the "skin peeling". The beyond is always close in the Alps, the wall between "here" and "there" thinner than elsewhere. Where heaven is so accessible - "gliding through a dream of clouds" - the opposite is also not far away.

"from... to... in..." stands for modern sport, electronic timekeeping, race tables, the normative factual about sport, lamented by many because "everything is so reduced to numbers." Numbers create hierarchical structures. One is first, the next second, and so on - everyone knows where they stand. There's nothing diffuse about skiing, as in so many team sports; the clock is inexorable. "Magnificent panoramic views" are offered today, technically facilitated and in many cases only conditionally, to a degree that was unimaginable a hundred years ago. We are living in the age of ascension aids. This is an interesting glossing over of the actual process: Nothing helps me climb.

It's not even necessary, because I'm not climbing up anywhere anymore. I get on the gondola, and a short time later and many hundreds of feet higher, I get off, but nothing forces me to ascend even of the most modest kind - that is, to lift my body weight. I don't lift anything, not an inch, I take a step in and then another step out. This is undoubtedly practical and very convenient and an indispensable prerequisite of a reasonably developed tourism (we cannot speak of mass tourism here anyway, if we use the holidaymaker numbers on southern shores as a reference). But it's called upward mobility. There is a little shame in that. Because of the heroes of the founding years. Hartmann on the Galzigspitze...