



Setting the towers. Don Redmon surveying, Bob Lumkin in crane borrowed from Moffet Lumber.



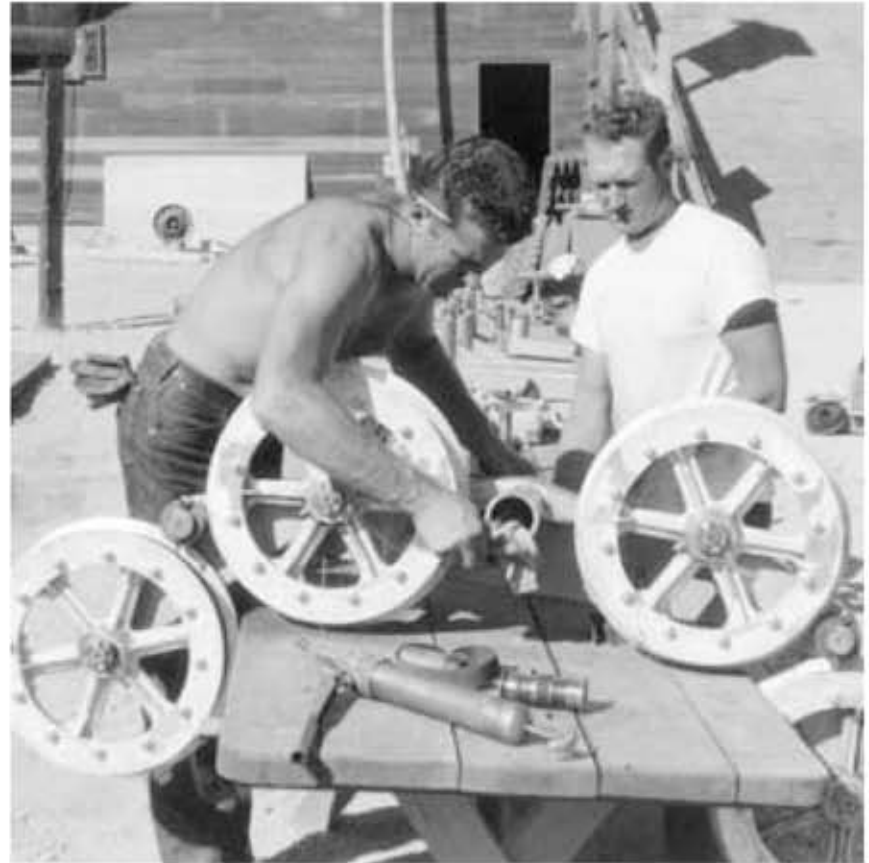
From left: Dave McCoy, Roy the welder, Don Redmon setting a tower.



Raising the "halo" guard that kept swinging chairs away from the towers.



Assembling sheaves at the base of Chair 1 ramp.



Don Redmon and Dave McCoy



Dave McCoy directing the tower raising for the bottom terminal counterweight.



Chair 2 Terminals

We built the 40-some-foot-long structure frame that housed the Chair 2 bullwheel at the bottom of Chair 1, loaded it on a truck, and drove it over. It turned out the wrong end was downhill, so we had to lift that thing and maneuver it in the middle of a bunch of trees. Bob Lumkin was operating the crane and I was standing on the tracks. We got it turned around, set it down, and he was booming up to do something. I said, "Bob, that's far enough," and he just kept booming. The crane didn't have any safety stops on it and I could feel the track coming up so I said, "You better lock the house because this thing's going over backwards." That's what happened. Fortunately it fell into a tree that cushioned the fall and didn't hurt anything. We used a piece of cable and a tractor to pull it up on its wheel and went back to work.

—DON REDMON



Bottom terminal of Chair 2 with fixed loading zone and a twenty-foot access ramp.

We put the loading zone high on scaffolds right where the road came, then pushed a lot of dirt with the cooperation of the State and County to move the highway where it is now. Skiers loaded right at the bullwheel.

—DAVE MCCOY

Chair 5 Opened 1964-65

Tony Sowder from Riblet Tramway came back with his price for Chair 5, but Dave was determined we could do it cheaper, dead-set on having an adjustable terminal. I called Tony and asked him what he could do to lower the price. Tony said, "How many towers do you want me to leave out?" I said, "Tony, don't you understand? If you don't build Chair 5, you won't ever build another chair on Mammoth Mountain."

—DON REDMON

We built a crane in the old garage, used a greyhound bus chassis—it was a whole bastardized thing, a beautiful work of art. When the crane lowered the towers onto the bolts, sometimes things wouldn't line up quite right. You would just have to bang them with sledgehammers to get them to sit right. Nuts [P-Nut McCoy] and I were the only guys who would volunteer for that. We got real nervous when this heavy base tower came lurching down. Rake or Cooper was in the driver's seat of the crane working the levers while the other was standing on top of the first guy's brake foot, trying to keep the whole thing from going to hell.

—ED CEREDA

The original Chair 5 towers were square and depending on the time of year and the time of day, no matter what you did, they wouldn't line up. When the sun hit one side, that side would expand and the cable would be riding on the inside of the roller. And on account of the steep terrain, you couldn't run a full load because the extra drag on the cable line would blow the motor.

—WALLY MANN



Bob Cooper driving the crane.



Don Rake



P-Nut McCoy



Ed Cereda

Chair 6 Opened 1965-66

Paul Hunziker, who had a plant in Spanish Fork, Utah, agreed to build an adjustable terminal for Chair 5. I'd seen square towers working well in Switzerland but didn't realize the height we needed to build ours caused too much heat absorption—if we had built sheaves that hung free, the square towers would have worked. On Chair 6, we could adjust the entire bottom terminal. We built a big square angle-iron with wheels we could guide up and down.

—DAVE MCCOY



Wally Mann



Poncho McCoy and Dennis Agee, with Dave seated in front.

A Young Crew

Within the time allowed, the equipment we had, and the experience we didn't have, no one thought we could pull it off. But the crew was young. They didn't know that something couldn't be done.

—DAVE MCCOY



David "Tuffy" Mitchell



Larry Reynolds



Dennis Agee

We called ourselves "Keystone Construction Company" and Bob Cooper was our boss.

—LARRY REYNOLDS

Some of the guys wrote "Keystone Construction" in every footing they poured, but we would find a real pretty rock to place where we were pouring. We called the rocks "gems."

—DENNIS AGEE

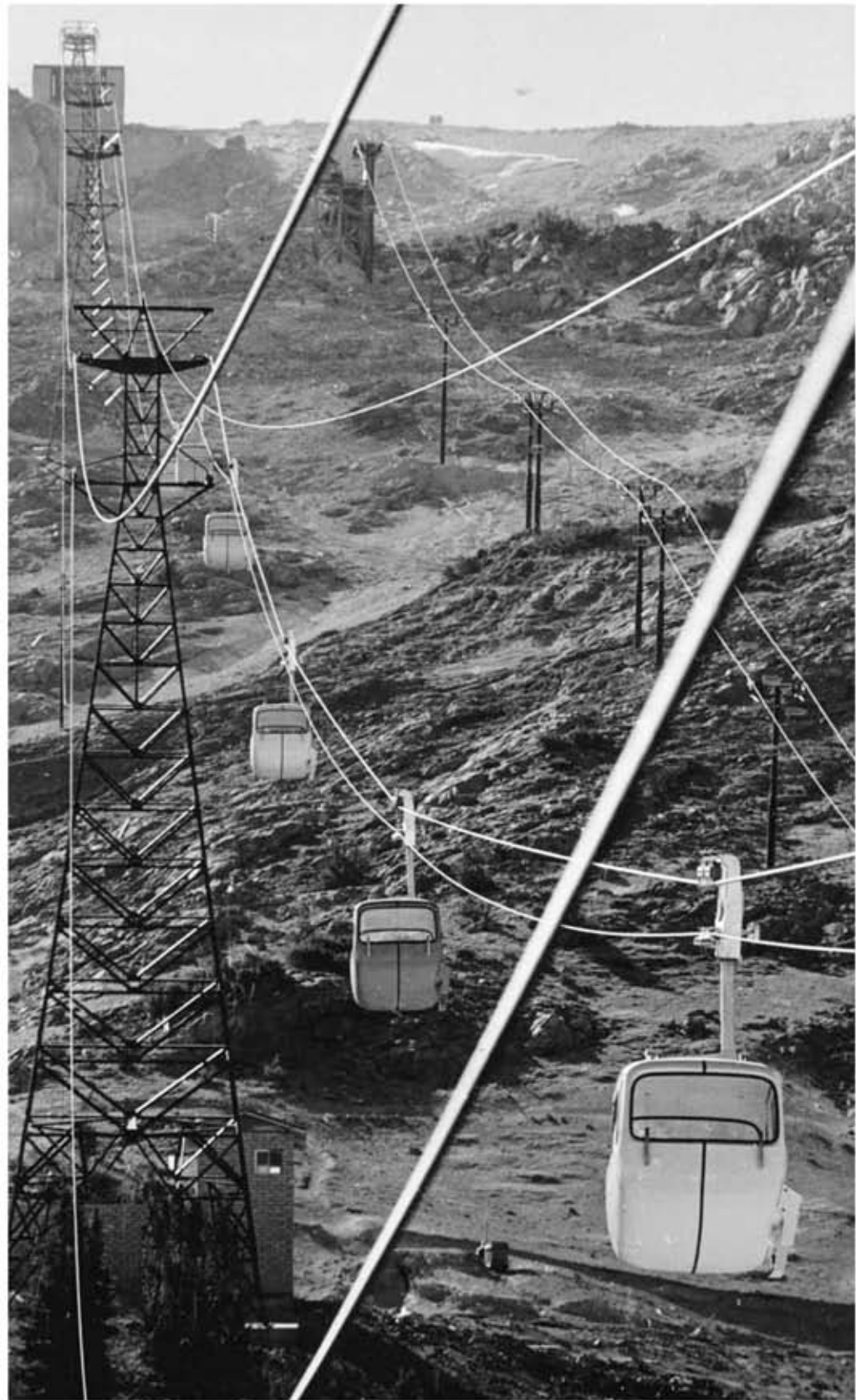
It took three summers to build the gondola. The first summer, 1965, we finished part of the lower section including some towers. The second summer, 1966, we got all the parts, worked like hell, finished the lower section, had the towers up on the upper section, and most of the building put together on the top terminal. The third summer, 1967, it took a month's time to get the top section going. No accidents—a couple of pieces of steel dropped, but we never had so much as a cut finger building that whole gondola.

—DON RAKE

All the motors, drives, and assemblies were imported from Europe, but we assembled everything here. The Swiss guys from Bell couldn't quite understand the way we did things. I see them jacking these things up with a come-along—the shoes that the cable rides on and they weighed about 300 pounds each—moving them one inch at a time and I open my big mouth and say, "Let's use block and tackle and pull them up." So we rigged one up. They're saying, "No, no, no," and we said, "Just relax." After that, they got the biggest kick out of asking us if we could lift this or that.

This one short and stocky Swiss in his fifties adjusted everything with a 35-pound hammer. He would pick it up overhead. I couldn't even lift it. We won more beers with those guys down at the Village Inn, having them arm wrestle.

—WALLY MANN



Testing Upper Gondola between Mid-Station and the top before it opened in November 1967.

Steve Thompson was driving the old Army GI truck filled with three yards of mix for Tower 3. The truck didn't have brakes, so I was holding a huge rock ready to throw it under a wheel if he bogged down. The truck started to roll back and I threw the rock, but it didn't stop, just kept going backward down the Face of Three. When Steve tried to turn back on the road, the truck flipped over onto the driver's side. I watched it crash, then saw a person blasting straight downhill as fast as he could run. Agee was on the top of Three, but no radio, so we went to Mid-Chalet to find Dave. He asked, "Is anybody hurt?" Then said sort of nonchalantly, "Okay, let's go up there and get it." He drove the D8 up the Face, hooked it to the truck, pulled downhill, and the truck rolled over.

—CLIFFORD MANN

We took the loaded barrel off at Mid-Chalet, hooked it to the D8, and rolled it in the pumice until the cement came out. We picked it up with the crane to hose it out, then replaced all the spark plugs and straightened the fuel tank—had it in service the next day.

—DENNIS AGEE

This is just a story I heard second hand about a truck on its side, the driver standing there all panicked and Dave drives up in the jeep. He asks the guy, "Do you have your grease gun?" The guy asks why and Dave says, "Well, it's upside down, you might as well grease it."

—KENNY MILICI



Poncho McCoy and the recovered cement truck.



From left: Bob Bumbaugh, Dennis Agee, Steve Thompson, Dave McCoy.



Two days after the accident. Poncho McCoy and David "Tuffy" Mitchell cheering as Dennis Agee arrived with the final truckload of cement for Tower 3.



It Works!

In 1998, just before we started taking down the gondola to build the new one, I drove to the top, spent about an hour up there, sitting alone on the ridge, looking out and wondering... "How did we do it?"

—DAVE MCCOY

Dave McCoy and Don Rake, 1967. "That first ride was a thrill. Going up wasn't so bad, but boy, facing that first ride coming down I was thinking, I hope this stays together." —Don Rake



The chasm between Upper Gondola Tower 3 and the top pressure frame as seen from the bottom of Dave's Run.