

# NEWSLETTER

# ALTA ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER

FALL 2024 | ISSUE 104



## Summer Projects Recap: New Conveyors and Willow Relocation

By Jen Melton

This summer, Alta Ski Area embarked on a project to improve the beginner skier experience and make transportation easier from the Transfer Tow area to the base of Alf Engen Ski School. To accomplish this, two new conveyors were constructed on the southwest side of the Albion Ticket Office. The US Forest Service (USFS) and the Alta Environmental Center considered this project's environmental impacts and two primary concerns were identified within the project area: a riparian zone passing directly through the construction site and the historical site of the original Town of Alta.

*The riparian zone in consideration, or the interface area between land and a stream, contains a perennial drainage just south of the Albion parking lot. Perennial drainages refer to natural or man-made channels that carry water year-round during normal precipitation.*



Conveyor construction in the Albion base area

At Alta, where there is water, there is likely willows. The USFS requested that a large clump of native willows be relocated before construction began. Willows tend to have a very resilient temperament and have been successfully relocated in the past by Alta. The relocation took form in two different strategies: one was to remove large sections of its root system with an excavator and immediately replant those into the banks of nearby drainages. The second strategy was to remove clippings of the young growth, store them in water until the fall, and plant those into the ground as propagations. Both strategies were carried out by the Alta Environmental Center. Propagations were replanted

into some of our active wetland restoration sites around the mountain.



Willow relocation by root extraction with excavator

The second concern was that the conveyors were to be constructed within the historical site of the original Town of Alta formed in the silver mining era (1870-1900s). Moving dirt tends to lead to the finding of artifacts previously unfound in areas like this. Professional archaeologists from the company SWCA were hired to monitor every scoop of dirt that was pulled from the project site. And interesting artifacts were found indeed! Shards of glass bourbon bottles, shoe heels, butter knives, shell buttons, original chinaware, and glass goblets were recovered, recorded, and turned over to the Alta Historical Society.



Artifacts found in the old Town of Alta historical site  
T: Butter knife | L: Bourbon bottle | R: Shoe heel





## Chad's Gap: What You Didn't Know

By Liz Rocco

Many of you may know the story of Chad's Gap—or perhaps you've even attempted the jump yourself. But do you know the history behind the mine tailing piles that formed the infamous gap?

Chad's Gap, a 120-foot gap jump in Grizzly Gulch, is named after Alta local Chad Zurinkas, who first recognized the potential of two pyramidal mine tailing piles as a possible gap jump. According to legend, Chad made several attempts to clear the gap in January 1999 but fell short, leaving him bruised and sporting a fat lip. He then stepped aside, allowing 16-year-old Candide Thovex to take a shot. On his second attempt, Thovex successfully cleared and landed the jump, becoming the first to conquer Chad's Gap.

This summer, I joined the Historical Mining Hike organized by the Utah Cultural Site Stewardship Program and the Alta Environmental Center. Our guide, Christopher Merritt—a Utah State Historic Preservation Officer with a PhD in Industrial Archaeology—shared fascinating insights into the area's mining history. I thought I had a decent understanding of Alta's pre-skiing history, but I was unprepared for the avalanche of new information Chris shared at every turn of the trail.

Alta was a booming mining town in the late 1800s, with the Emma Mine becoming the world's largest silver producer in 1873! In the 1870s, horse-drawn wagons carved out the Michigan City Road, a key route for the nearby mines—this historic road is still used as a trail year-round. Chad's iconic uphill pyramids began forming in the 1870s as piles of waste rock, were dumped during mining operations. When the mine closed, these piles were left behind along the roadside. Around 1900, the mine reopened, and more waste rock was dumped over the road by an elevated trestle, creating a second pile. These two piles became the now famous gap jump!

Today, remnants of mining history serve not only as the backdrop for a daring jump but also as a testament to Alta's rich heritage.

Check out ACE's new Chad's Gap mural on the Town of Alta Fire House  
Artist: Kristen Frailey | Instagram: [alta\\_community\\_enrichment](#)







## Life of a Harvested Tree

By Anna Lee

Life as a tree harvested at Alta can be hard, especially for those that take root in challenging locations. Our revegetation efforts at Alta go beyond aesthetics—they're rooted in history and necessity. During the mining boom of the late 1800s, the area was completely deforested, leaving the small mining town of Alta vulnerable to uncontrollable flooding and avalanches thundering down the bare mountainsides.

Trees play a crucial role in our environment—they clean the air, stabilize the snow pack, and create the best deep powder tree-skiing conditions in Westward Ho after fresh snowfall. Since 1991, we've planted over 42,000 trees to help continue reforestation efforts on the mountainside that was once stripped bare.

As trees mature and new seedlings emerge, some end up in less-than-ideal spots on the mountain. Those sprouting along groomed runs often struggle beneath the weight of one-ton groomers that pass over them daily. Since trees need ample space to grow tall, they sometimes require a helping hand to find a better home.

We keep an eye on groups of saplings in groomed runs that may need help—carefully harvesting around 150 saplings each year. When we find a sapling in a tough spot, we dig it up and relocate it to our tree nursery, a cozy haven nestled in the woods of the Sunnyside area.

Once the saplings make it to the nursery, they undergo a makeover—receiving extra nutrient-rich soil and a quick dunk in the stream. They'll spend the winter here, resting and strengthening their roots.

As spring arrives and the snow melts, the saplings wake up, stronger and ready to find their permanent homes. We assess their needs and scout ideal locations for them to thrive. With the help of Alta employees and community members, these trees will soon begin their new lives, far from the groomed runs.



This year, 131 Engelmann spruce saplings were collected from the Roller Coaster, Big Dipper, and Papa Bear areas during our annual Tree Harvesting Day with TreeUtah. The AEC crew gathered an additional 60 saplings, all of which were relocated to our Tree Nursery.

On Employee Planting Day, a team of 20 planted 105 Engelmann spruce saplings harvested in 2023, relocating them from the tree nursery to the woods of the Supreme area.



## A Summer With the AEC

By Anna Lee

This summer, I joined the Alta Environmental Center (AEC) crew to help protect and improve the natural environment where we recreate—both above and below the snow.

Alta is home to a delicate ecosystem steeped in rich history, known for producing some of the best snow on earth while serving as a vital clean water resource for the thousands below the canyon. This land is cared for by a community of stewards that are driven to learn, educate and take action to create a better place for today, tomorrow and the years to come.

I've always been drawn to Alta for its deep snow and commitment to preserving our playground. Six years ago, I left my small island hometown in Massachusetts for Salt Lake City, seeking both education and adventure. While studying at Westminster University, I often found myself spending more time on the Wildcat lift than at my classroom desk—what I referred to as a “hands-on learning” experience. After earning my degree in Environmental Science and Marketing, I knew I wouldn't be leaving Little Cottonwood Canyon anytime soon. This summer, I was fortunate to put my knowledge to the test both in the office and on the slopes with the AEC.



My time with the AEC has deepened my appreciation for the intricate balance between recreation and preservation. The lessons I've learned this summer will guide my ongoing commitment to sustainability and conservation in this beautiful place we're lucky to call home. I'm excited to use my knowledge, eagerness to learn and love for this land to create positive impacts as I continue my work with the Alta Environmental Center.



Class is outside this winter, and everyone's invited! From December to April, on-mountain tours led by non-profit organizations are offered weekly. Perfect for the nature enthusiast or those just curious about the land they are recreating on. These classes are free, family-friendly, and open to skiers of all abilities. So grab your skis and snowshoes—class looks different at Alta!



*"The environment is where we all meet, where we all have mutual interest. It is the one thing all of us share."*  
- Lady Bird Johnson

Visit [alta.com/environment](https://alta.com/environment) for more information and registration.

### Birding On Skis | Tracy Aviary

Every first and third Thursday of the month

### Trees And Skis | TreeUtah

Every second Wednesday of the month

### Ski With A Ranger | CCF

Every Thursday, weekly

### Snowshoe With A Naturalist | CCF

Every third Friday of the month

### Journey Through Historical Snowscapes | UCSS

February 28th, 2025