PERISHER HISTORICAL SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER

Issue 21 Summer 2018-19

Notes from the President

Greetings, it has been a busy year for the Society and your Committee.

Hosting the annual conference of the Australian Alpine & Snowsports History Association (AASHA 2018) absorbed considerable time and left the PHS committee somewhat exhausted but the result was well worth the effort. On reflection, the Society and I have been blessed to have such a dedicated group of people who enthusiastically step forward. We continue to receive congratulations for the conference content and the staging. We are naturally indebted to the presenters for their time and effort in preparation.

AASHA 2019 – Ben Lomond 3-5 May

Next year the AASHA conference is being hosted by the Northern Tasmanian Ski Club at Ben Lomond Ski Fields in Tasmania. Ben Lomond Alpine Village is 60 km from Launceston. Quite a number of us will be attending. More information will be provided as it becomes available.

As if you need it, but this is just one more reason to visit Tasmania - come and join the fun. There are some of us able to use this as an opportunity to visit our roots. One of mine arrived in 1885.

Our New Publication

The wonderful book by John Davis – *A History of the Early Development of Perisher-Smiggins* - has vindicated the decision to print his marvellous tale. That John and Pat Davis were present to witness this exciting time and then to record it so faithfully is a great legacy for these two very special people.

John has a great turn of phrase and truly transports the reader back to their snow experiences, commencing in 1955 right through the frenetic development period of the Sixties. The book is laced with characters, observations and fun.
A wonderful Christmas present.

Keith McCutcheon

I note the passing of Keith McCutcheon earlier this year. Keith was a founding member of Redwood Ski Club. He offered his services to the Society on hearing of its formation. PHS is grateful for his enthusiastic support in serving on the committee in the first and second years of incorporation. We offer our condolences to his wife Maureen and his family.

Philip Woodman

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Hello in the Snow
August 2018

The wild weather at Perisher in early August may have stopped the lifts but it certainly didn't stop the cross country skiers. They still turned up in numbers to race, take part in the Coffee Tour and enjoy a convivial afternoon in the Marritz bar, co-hosted by PHS and Perisher-XC. With PHS members and friends, they filled the bar for 'Hello in the Snow', the annual mid-season catch-up on Tuesday 7 August. Over drinks and delicious canapés, old friends met up, new connections were made and there was a wonderful buzz of conversation, with stories of past glories and more recent skiing experiences.

Our thanks to Manager, Simone, and her staff at Marritz for another great afternoon.

Vale Colin Campbell Myers

25.3.1925 – 6.9.2018

by John Myers (based on his eulogy)

Our Dad really had a great innings, and an incredible life. He was a legend of the ski industry, a visionary, and a pioneer, in creating, with his family, the best family and beginner ski area in Australia, the Mt Selwyn Ski Resort. A close Swedish friend of mine once referred to my father as the 'King of Selwyn'. Well that he was, but he was so much more.

My father was born in Tumut 93 and a half years ago, to Harry and Nell Myers, the third of four kids. My Father's Dad, Harry, was a second generation West Blowering farmer. His mother emigrated from Scotland, a Campbell no less. Not sure if that is something to be proud of, but we are definitely proud of our Scottish heritage.

When my Dad started school, he used to ride 6 miles (to the young people, that is 10 km) on horseback to school and back each day. The school on Brandy Mary's Flat is now beneath the Blowering Dam wall. Yes, that dam has only been there for a little over 50 years. Dad then attended Tumut High School, leaving when he got his Intermediate Certificate at 16, and joining what is now the NAB Bank in Mittagong. We think he was a pretty good student because it looks like he won a few book awards, something I never achieved.

In 1943, at the age of 18 he ran off, well maybe not so much 'ran', but went off to join the Royal Australian Air Force, to become a pilot. After the initial training in Temora on Tiger Moths, he was sent off to Calgary, Canada, to continue his flight training.

Here was a young man, who grew up less than 1 hour from the famous Kiandra ski fields, where skiing really began in Australia, back in the 1860s, but he waited till he'd travelled half way around the world to try skiing, and of all places, at Mt Norquay near Banff. I can tell you, Norquay is not for the faint hearted: it has one of the steepest runs I have ever seen.

And that is where it all started. That is where my father got hooked on skiing, an addiction that spread like a rash through the whole family. Since that first skiing adventure in Canada, around 1943/44, our father has skied every year since. Dad was still skiing at 91 years of age; he had skied for more than 70 years.

Dad finished his Air Force training as a gun pilot, and was waiting to be shipped out to fight the Japanese, when the war finished. So after a bit more skiing, well maybe a lot more skiing, and touring all around North America, he was shipped back to Australia and eventually discharged from the Air Force. He then headed back to the family farm. This is where he decided he wanted to make a life on the land, eventually buying the farm next to his father. He started with dairy cattle, then changed to beef, lamb and wool and growing millet for brooms.

Not long after this, my father spotted a good looking wee lass living on a property with her parents just down the road. He asked her out on a date, not to go dancing, no my Dad had other ideas. It was a skiing date near Kiandra. In those days there were no ski lifts and no groomed ski runs, so they spent the day walking up the hill, and trying to ski down. I am sure Dad coached Mum a little.

Surprisingly, our future Mum was impressed, because after four years of courtship (Dad did not rush these things), on 26 January 1951, they were married. Three years later along came me, and

another two years later, Janelle was born.

While he was in Canada, Dad saw and used what we would describe as the antiquated 'nut cracker rope tow'. These were ski lifts that pulled you up the hill, thank goodness, no more walking. Eventually he convinced the Tumut Ski Club that this was the way to go, and with his Canadian experience and the skills of others, the Club built a tow and installed it near Kiandra.

As we know, having kids can really hinder your skiing time, so as soon as we could walk, we were put on skis. We had some help from our parents, but mostly we learnt to ski by watching all the other kids, and helping each other.

Back in the late 1950s a guy by the name of Peter Fountain, a Kiandra local, built a T-bar ski lift at Kiandra, a real step up from the old nutcracker rope tow. When Peter decided to sell his lift in 1962, Bill Matthews, another Kiandra local, asked Dad to find him a skiing partner to help buy the lift with him. At that time our farm was being resumed so the government could build the Blowering Dam. So Dad joined Bill and they bought the ski lift for 500 pounds, that is 250 pounds each (about $1,000 in today's money). When Bill became ill in 1964, Dad and Mum bought out his half share for the same 250 pounds.

This is where we saw a big change in our family life: we now owned a ski field but, unfortunately, our parents thought we should still go to school, in Tumut. All that beautiful snow, and we were stuck in classrooms every Monday to Friday, just not fair. But what was incredible, is that every Sunday, Mum would drive us down that old windy dirt road between Kiandra and Tumut, in the old (no springs) Land Rover and then back up that mountain track every Friday afternoon, while Dad ran the ski lift all week. This happened every winter. What a sacrifice. Poor Dad, all week on his own, although all the skiers and locals made sure he amused himself.

And that is how the Mt Selwyn Ski Resort began.

Although, my father was busy running a farm, building a ski resort, and raising two kids, in the middle of the 1960s, he decided he wanted to give back to the community, and joined the Tumut Rotary Club. As we grew up he became more and more involved. He served as Club President, and in the later years was awarded life membership. Rotary also bestowed on Dad, one of their highest honours, the Paul Harris Fellow, for contribution to the local community and Rotary.

Dad was also a keen lawn bowler for many years. Although I don't remember him winning a great many tournaments, he did suffer a sore head after many a Bowls Day: he did enjoy the social side of things.

Both Dad's brothers were renowned for their musical talents, Dad not so much, so he turned to magic, putting on many shows for kids and adults alike, especially the trick of cutting off a person's arm, well cutting carrots, and not cutting the arm at all.

As Mum and Dad got older, they took up travelling: around Australia, around the world, Antarctica, South and North America, Africa, skiing in Europe, especially with our friends in Switzerland, a rail trip from China through Siberia, Russia and into Norway. Then there were lots of cruises, around the Pacific, Alaska, up to Japan.

Dad, thank you for giving us so much, for giving us the love of skiing. You will be missed so much by so many people, but especially your family. You are joining many great friends at the bar and on the powder slopes in Heaven. May the slopes be steep, may the snow be soft and feathery, and sky blue each day…

Life above the snowline

by Nick Kennedy (Guthega Inn)

Winter 2018: Lyrebirds, wallabies, echidnas and wombats risk life and limb finding food on the roadside which is fringed by ash and eucalyptus trees clinging and clutching to hold their place. The ground pitches steeply overhead and up out of drivers' sight. We are definitely seeing more animals each year (including feral) as the canopy and undergrowth, lost in the fires of 2003, repairs itself - faster in the sections with a sunny, northerly aspect and very slowly in those without. The burnt tree trunks, now mostly clean and stripped of soot by wind and ice, poke deliriously through the new growth below.

The sun makes a mesmerising (and dangerously distracting) show of diamonds through shiny eucalyptus leaves as the road winds on to the hydro station and pulls steeply up to the snowline. We make the trip to Perisher and/or Jindabyne to pick up linen, food, beverages, other supplies and sometimes guests most days in winter. Passing Link Road, which is the summer turnoff to Smiggin Holes, signals 'nearly home', though the sight of the locked gate with fresh vehicle tracks below can be a little depressing. As we climb and loop around the back of Mt Blue Cow we see ski tourers heading up from the power station toward the Rolling Grounds and the Schlink Hilton. Further on Guthega Trig and Mt Tate come into view then Tate East Ridge and further west Mt Twynam, beyond which waits the best terrain! The snow pack is deep already and the Main Range is beckoning– looking forward very much to getting out there with Torsten, Bruno, Rupert and others when things slow down in September. The work will make sure we're fit for it.

In the carpark at Guthega families and small groups, mostly regulars, chat and wait for lifts to spin while others prepare equipment for day and overnight journeys beyond the resort boundaries. Weather plays a big role of course and most of the regulars know where to be in certain conditions. Following a couple of fine, clear days there is a moderate north westerly blowing this morning - heralding the arrival of another cold front within the next 24 hours. Those wanting shelter and blown-in snow may head straight to Rock Garden – at least until the crowd arrives.

It's a busy day for us today. The Guthega Interclub (aka Guthega Olympics) competition is being held on Lindner this morning and we have a team of staff and guests entered. Really hoping to change our fortunes a little since the last trophy we won was for 'best stack': a double ejection with head plant so memorable that the 'Bent Stock' award stayed on proud display at the Inn for an additional year. As well as our usual breakfast, lunch and dinner operations, we are hosting the interclub presentation again and expect most of the 100 plus entrants from all the Guthega clubs to make an appearance mid-afternoon. This is probably our favourite event of the winter. The people who take part tend to be frequenters at other times and the whole event, which is driven by Guthega Ski Club, is terrific. The lift status report indicates all

Guthega Interclub 2018

lifts running, so lots of skiers and riders will be rotating around the resort. Plenty to do.

We park and transfer the load into the oversnow vehicle for the last 800 m uphill to the Inn: kegs of beer, boxes of wine, meat and vegetables this morning. At the turning circle a few club guests are moving luggage into cars, making way for fellow members. A nod of acknowledgement, wave goodbye or brief farewell as time permits on our way past. Our outgoing guests will be dropped at their vehicles and new arrivals will be picked up during the afternoon and evening. In wild weather we can find ourselves out pretty late, helping guests and others arrive safely. In blizzard conditions drifts form quickly on the section above Link Road despite the best efforts of the non-stop grader team and, anyway, on any day transferring guests and luggage as they park is easier on everybody concerned. Leaving the Carpark chairlift terminal and Perisher's shop front behind we pass through the 'village', a collection of new and old club lodges, each reflecting a continuation of the pride and enthusiasm which led to their creation, in many cases by the parents and grandparents of the current membership. The clubs embrace and reflect the values of their forefathers and there is pride in Guthega's history and maintaining mountain competencies.

Last turn into the driveway. A quick radio call from the carpark means there are hands to help unload, distribute and store the produce. The public areas have been cleaned and the day's lunch menu is finalised,

chalked, printed and posted on line. Thankfully a few days have passed since the last snowfall and it is a dig-free morning on the terrace. Inside and outside furniture is arranged according to forecast demand and de-iced, stations prepped, staff in place. Anyone seen Ben? After a cold clear night, the snow is hard on the legs and there are people on the doorstep early. Trading commences at 11.00 am. By 11.05 am and despite a cool wind the terrace is full. Do we have enough goulash soup? Better have the breakfast room ready to pop open if needed. The wind has now dropped, it's Saturday and I can feel a 300 covers lunch coming on. How much wiener schnitzel have we got? Also, by 11.05 am our noble team of staff and guests have all navigated two runs of the Giant Slalom without mishap and returned in good spirits, certain that they have avoided the 'Bent Stock Award'. Things are looking up.

Lunch well over, the Inn is still busy with folk lingering to enjoy the view, villagers dropping in for sundowners and the back country community returning with tales of the day, before heading to campsites at Island Bend. Ralph and Co from Guthega Ski Club (GSC) are setting up the prize giving and we have printed the results. We pass around some soup and snacks for the weary athletes and enjoy the camaraderie and good natured club spirit. GSC members as usual are the fastest but due to a thorough understanding of the algorithm (not to mention a few guests who can really ski) the Inn has won the mixed handicap category. A triumph for gender balance. There is plenty of laughter and we all agree that 'Guthega Hour', when the village and the slopes are vacated by visitors and returned to the Guthegarians is a cherished part of the day. As the sun sets, mothers are on lodge balconies calling unseen children to come in for dinner.

Housekeeping completed, new arrivals are calling as they leave Jindabyne keen for road reports and to arrange over-snow transfers. Guests check-in and are settled in as the Inn is set for dinner. The last après guests are bid farewell as house guests appear and dinner service commences. We now enter residential mode with a full house and a few outside dinner bookings. Back of house we are preparing accounts, ordering stock and supplies, confirming reservation details, planning for tomorrow's snowfall and Karl Guenther has been in to give us direction. All good! Is there enough fuel for the snow blower?

Skiing Mt Townsend

by Warren Peck

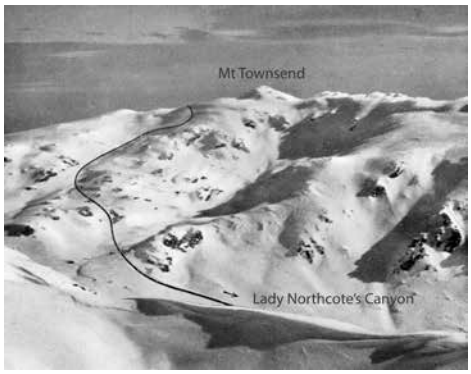
Who were the first skiers to successfully negotiate the challenging ski runs down Mt Townsend and the adjoining Little Austria?

The ski pioneers pictured at right on the Western Faces of the Kosciuszko Main Range in 1947 had skied at least 6 km cross-country from the Chalet at Charlotte Pass in order to access Kosciuszko's steepest and longest ski runs. However, they were not the first to ski these slopes; that privilege belongs to Tom Mitchell and George Day, who first skied them in 1934.

Townsend North Spur from Sentinel Peak (photo by Frank Leyden, 20 July 1947)

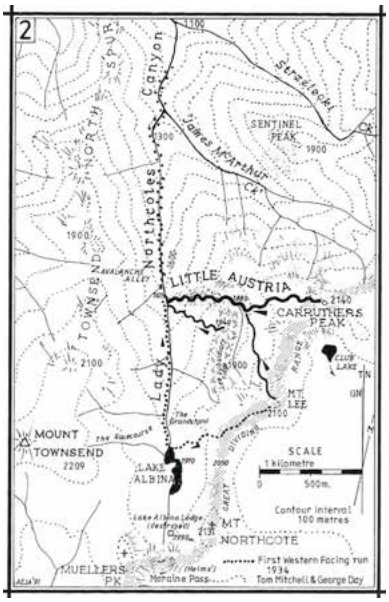
Having climbed back up to Mt Twynam, after a couple of runs in 1947, these ski tourers then faced skiing the 6 km return trip to the Chalet, as is the case in 2018. Skiers wanting to access Mt Townsend's long and steep ski runs these days can only do so using skis, hiking boots or snow-shoes. The use of Skidoos and other mechanised means of oversnow transport is banned on, or near, the Kosciuszko Main Range.

The first recorded ski descent of Mt Townsend's steep slopes was in 1934, when Tom Mitchell and George Day skied down Townsend's flanks from "Lake Albina into the Northcote Canyon, below the Townsend Spur, and up a gully they named Little Austria, for its Arlberg-like appearance, then on to a steep ridge leading to Carruther's Peaks" (Elyne Mitchell, *Australia's Alps,* 1942). "In 1937 there were various exploring parties out to the slopes off Carruther's and down below Lake Albina to the Northcote Canyon in search of a racecourse for the Inter-Dominion ski races against the New Zealanders."



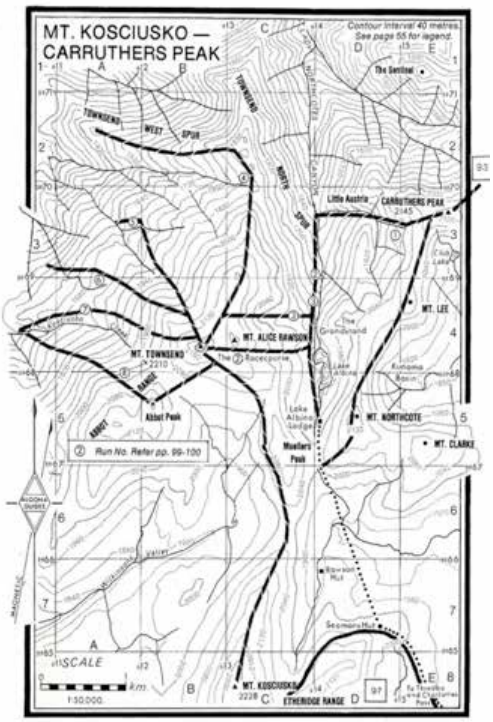
The 1937 Inter-Dominion race route from Mt Townsend into Lady Northcote's Canyon (from Peter Southwell-Keely, ***Out on the Tops****, 2009)*

Alan Andrews' map (published in 1993) shows the route that Tom and George skied in 1934.



During the 1940s, the Ski Council of NSW had advocated the building of a Memorial Shelter Hut close to the Western Faces of Mt Townsend and the Kosciuszko Main Range. On 12 October 1950, a meeting convened by Charles Anton and attended by the Vice-Chairman of the Kosciuszko State Park Trust (Mr D.S. Mulley), the Secretary and Director of the NSW Government Tourist Bureau (Mr Harold Best) and representatives of the Ski Council of NSW (including its President, Mr C.A. Alexander, accompanied by George Day and Ken Breakspear), approved the construction of the Lake Albina Lodge with unanimous support from all persons and organisations present. The Ski Tourers Association (later the Australian Alpine Club, AAC) was then inaugurated at a well-attended meeting held on 10 November 1950, with the initial goal of building a touring lodge in the vicinity of Lake Albina. These decisions were also communicated to the general skiing community by Bob Arnott, writing in the December 1950 issue of *Ski Horizon* and by Don Richardson writing in the *1951 Australian Ski Year Book.*

Lake Albina Lodge was the first Ski Tourers Project: construction of the lodge commenced in the 1950/1951 summer and the lodge offered shelter to every skier and walker on the Main Range from the 1951 winter until its demolition in 1983.



The map above was jointly published by the AAC and Algona Guides in the book *Ski Touring in Australia,* showing the popular ski runs in the Mt Kosciusko Summit-Carruthers Peak area in 1978. Points of interest can be identified by co-ordinates, with letters running across the page from left to right and numbers running vertically down the page from top to bottom. Note that Lake Albina Lodge was subsequently demolished, as was Rawson Hut.

Eight long and steep ski runs, popular in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, are shown on the map and five are described briefly below. The most appropriate skis for making these runs were downhill skis, or touring skis with downhill-type bindings. Between 2 and 3 hours were usually needed for the climb out after each of these runs, and hence a half-day should be allowed for making each round trip. Runs 1 to 3 are in partly sheltered valleys, but the remaining five runs are on the exposed western faces of the Abbott Range and these five runs provide magnificent panoramic views. Whilst the descent of any of these runs might take about half an hour, or less, the climb out afterwards might take between two and three hours.

For those not used to assessing ski runs by their slope angle and vertical descent, here are a couple of comparisons. The top half of Thredbo's Ramshead Chairlift and the lower half of the Mt Perisher Triple Chairlift, both average 20 degrees. The fall between the top station of Thredbo's Crackenback Chairlift and its bottom station is 550m vertical; from the top of Mt Perisher to the bottom station of the Mt Perisher Triple Chairlift is a fall of 280 m vertical.

Run 1, known as Little Austria, commences on Carruthers Peak and finishes in Lady Northcote's Canyon 500 m below. The run is 1.5 km long with an average slope of 18.5 degrees, and the lower part is in a funnel which provides exhilarating banked turns. The run can be joined from Mt Lee.

Run 2, known as the Race Course, commences on the summit of Mt Townsend (2210 m) and has an average slope of 15 degrees down to Lake Albina and 14 degrees in the canyon. Interest is added to this run by the bumps in its upper half and vistas of the dramatically steep slopes of the Townsend North Spur**. Run 3** is similar to Run 2, but commences in a gully about 300 m north of the Race Course and joins Run 2 at the top of the canyon.

Run 4, with a length of 2.8 km, is the longest, dropping 695 m in 2.8 km with an average slope of 17 degrees.

Run 5 is somewhat steeper, dropping 685 m in 2.0 km. The general slope is 19.5 degrees on the top half and 22 degrees in the trees.

Run 8, with 26 degree slopes for much of its 1.8 km length, is the steepest run in the area and provides panoramic vistas over the rugged Geehi Valley to the west towards Victoria's Mt Bogong.

Mount Townsend's outstanding ski runs are 6.5 km from Charlotte Pass Ski Resort and 8.5 km from the top station of Thredbo's Crackenback Chairlift. It should be noted that skis and snowshoes are the only permitted mode of winter access. To undertake the return trip on alpine skis to Mount Townsend from one of these resorts, so as to be able to ski one of the challenging runs down the western faces, all in the same day, is a formidable task requiring at least eight hours under good weather conditions. The death of four snow boarders in a snow cave, about 1 km south of Seaman's Hut, on the night of 7 August 1999, demonstrated that snow caves and tents can become death traps if heavy snowfalls occur and/or large snowdrifts develop in windy weather conditions.

These days intending Mt Townsend skiers are essentially back to the 1947 situation of having to ski (or walk) quite a few kilometres in order to access any one of these eight runs.

One possible access point to these ski runs is from Charlotte Pass, which faces Mt Lee (right hand edge of photo below) across the Snowy River and from where the peak of Mt Townsend is just visible on the western horizon (see below). After crossing the Snowy River at an altitude of 1700 m, intending skiers need to climb the undulating terrain of the Main Range in order to reach the starting points for these spectacular ski runs.

View north from Run 4 along the Western Faces of the Main Range (photo by C. Peck)

The closest Western Faces run to Charlotte Pass is the Little Austria ski run, which can be reached by skiing about 1 km in a northerly direction from the summit of Mt Lee (altitude 2100 m). Mt Lee is located about 4 km from Charlotte Pass.

The runs that originate from Mt Townsend can be reached from Charlotte Pass by skiing 6.5 km in a westerly direction, crossing the Main Range (near Mt Northcote) at an altitude of about 2060 m and then skirting around Lake Albina (altitude 1910 m) en route to Mt Townsend (altitude 2210 m).

Following the demolition of the Lake Albina Ski Lodge in 1983, Illawong Lodge was the nearest overnight shelter used by Alan Andrews and his skiing companions, whenever they were skiing any of the magnificent ski runs on the Main Range between Mt Townsend and Mt Tate. However, it is understood that overnight accommodation is no longer readily available to members of the general public at Illawong Lodge.

Three weeks in Red Hut

by Brian (The Admiral) Anderson, Liz (Betty) Armstrong (nee Swain) and Peter (Pete) Stitt

The year was 1953 and five 18 to 20 year old members from the Sydney Bush Walking Club (the SBW), who each had experienced between one and three long weekends in the snow, decided that they should get more serious about skiing.

Besides the authors, those involved were Ross (Rosso) Laird and Bev Price. Normal holidays then were two weeks but for a variety of reasons, the Admiral, Betty, Bev and Peter had three weeks available and Rosso two. Pete was off to New Zealand in July and, as there had been good snow on the Queen's Birthday weekend in 1951 and 1952, ergo there would be good snow for the Queen's Birthday weekend 1953. Therefore we would go for three weeks starting the Queen's Birthday weekend.

That settled, the problem was how to achieve this on limited funds.

The first problem was accommodation. Mostly people stayed at the Hotel Kosciusko or the Chalet, both run by the NSW Government Tourist Bureau. The Hotel Kosciusko was burnt down in 1951 and at any rate it and the Chalet were far beyond our means. For those who don't know where the Hotel was located, the present day Sponars Inn was built as the staff quarters of the Hotel Kosciusko, or as Pete's mum (her father was the supervising architect) used to delight in pointing out, the 'Servants Quarters', since they didn't have 'Staff' in 1909 when it was opened, they only had 'Servants'!

Previous trips had involved such delights as camping in abandoned Snowy Mountain Authority (SMA) huts with no furniture and most of the windows smashed, or camping at the Cooma showground and sometimes only one day on the snow.

Remember that in 1953 the road south of Canberra was mostly gravel and if you were unlucky enough to be travelling after heavy rains and the Snowy Mountain Authority's ANTAR trucks (two prime movers, one in front and one behind with a low load tray between) had ground the road to pieces moving a heavy load or two, much of a long weekend could be spent just getting there and back. This was especially the case if mechanical problems were also encountered, not an infrequent occurrence in those days.

So although a trashed SMA hut might be acceptable for one or two nights, even bushwalkers looked for something a bit more up-market for a three week stay. None of us had been further up the Summit Road than Perisher Valley; however we had heard that there were huts further up the road that might be suitable. An expedition was therefore mounted for Easter of 1953 to examine the possibilities. For this we hired a near new Austin A40 Ute with a canopy. With a mattress on the tray and the tailgate lowered to accommodate our packs we could get three in the front and four in the back (not all those who came on the Easter trip were involved in the skiing adventure): we were away. How would a group of 18 to 20 year olds go hiring an equivalent vehicle (say a near new Holden Ute) in 2018?

On arrival, we first examined Perisher Hut, on the top of Perisher Gap and not far from where the bottom station of the Eyre T-Bar is today but on the opposite side of the road. If we remember correctly it had corrugated iron cladding, no lining and a dirt floor, and was ruled out as being too remote for a three week stay. Remember in those days there was almost nothing in Perisher Valley and just a Transit Hut at Smiggins. Betts Camp was also passed up, on the grounds that there were no hills close by and it was also too remote. This left Red Hut.

Red Hut was located on the left side of the Summit Road about 500 m short of Charlotte Pass. It was roughly rectangular and comprised two rooms, a bunk room about 6 m x 3 m with six bunks in three tiers of two, along the wall opposite the door and a 'kitchen' room say about 2.5 m x 3 m. The kitchen had a fireplace and a small bench against the wall under a window on the same side as the door. There was no other furniture, no toilet and the water supply was a soak on the opposite side of the road about 150 m up towards the Pass. And, despite the name, it was cream coloured.

In summer Red Hut was used by the road gangs maintaining the Summit Road and in winter it was rented out by the Chalet to skiers for the princely sum of £6/week/person ($12.00). For your money you also got a mattress, a pillow, some blankets for each bunk and a blunt axe for chopping firewood. And, it was

Outside the Chalet displaying our fashionable ski gear. From left to right Bev, Pete, Betty, Rosso and we think, the Chalet Manager, Vic Onorato.

close to both the Chalet and the Main Range. In short, it was a 'Bush Walkers Dream'!

That settled, we booked Red Hut for the three weeks from the Queen's Birthday in June and moved in for Easter. There followed a series of walks, including a drive to the Summit car park with most of us walking from Kosciuszko along the Main Range to Twynam and back to Red Hut. During the walk we ran into Charles Anton and a group from the Ski Tourers Association (later to become the Australian Alpine Club), who were sledging in (on grass) materials for the tow hut that they were building in the Lee-Northcote Basin. Charles put a good case as to why we should join the Ski Tourers.

So after a most enjoyable Easter it was back to Sydney and more planning.

Equipment was the next major issue. Skis, stocks and boots could be hired from the Tourist Bureau at what had been the stables for the Hotel Kosciusko. The problem was that, as befitting a Government bureaucracy, there was limited gear and Chalet guests had preference. They mostly arrived by train from Sydney and then by bus from Cooma and the train was often late. Even if you managed to get to the Hotel early on Saturday morning you might have to wait till mid-afternoon to get served. Moreover, the skis and boots remaining after the Chalet crowd had had their pick were inevitably from the bottom of the Department of Tourism's very deep barrel, the skis generally having no edges. On one occasion they ran out of stocks with only about 5 of our party of about 15 having been fixed up. The rest of us used (shush) broken off snow gum branches.

There had to be a better way. As buying gear was out on money grounds, the solution was blindingly simple: we would make our own gear. Ski blanks were ordered from Auski, whilst Pete manufactured edges for some of the skis from scrap stainless spring steel that he had access to. Edge grooves were planed into the blanks, the tops were stained (red cedar), edges fitted and varnished. The Admiral recalls marine varnish on top and Plastalac on the soles.

And they were long! The Admiral's and Betty's skis are still in existence, 220 and 190 cm long, respectively. In those days, the ideal ski length was considered to be somewhere between the palm of your outstretched arm and the tip of your fingers!

Plan A had been to construct our own Kandahar (cable, non-safety) bindings following a design by good friend Colin Putt. Col, a New Zealander and fellow SBW member was a bit older and had accumulated a few more scars and bruises than any of us. Pete's attempt at the first set was somewhat of a disaster, so it was agreed that we would squander money on Northland US army disposal Kandahar (non-safety) bindings purchased from Auski. The order and the money were telegraphed off on a Saturday morning and the bindings were delivered to Pete's parents' place in Sydney (from Melbourne and courtesy of TAA. We paid for airfreight) around 2.00 pm Monday afternoon. Could you beat that today, some 60 years later?

Then there was the question of stocks. Four pairs were fabricated with cane poles and baskets, with leather strapping. Pete for his part, who had had to ski with snow gum poles once the previous year while he was doing his National Service training in the RAAF, had manufactured a set on return to camp. The poles were a couple of alloy control rods from an wrecked Airspeed Oxford aircraft on its way to the tip and the rings for the baskets were turned

from the skirt of a couple of old aircraft engine pistons.

All very neat and light, although a problem that had escaped the notice of the proud manufacturer until arrival at Red Hut in 1953 was that they were only about 1 m long. At about 1.8 m high, he then found that, to use his stocks, he had to get around in a stance that would have gladdened the heart of a chimpanzee.

Boots were any heavy duty boots that we could lay our hands on, with a groove cut into the heel for the cable binding. The Admiral's were ex-army whilst Pete's were coal miners safety boots, complete with a steel caps, to which he had added rubber soles. As far as any of us can recall Betty's were Paddy Pallin bushwalking boots to which Pete had also added rubber soles, rather than the then almost obligatory ironmongery, tricounis, clinkers and triple hobs.

Clothes were pretty basic and perhaps inadequate by today's standards with Paddy Pallin wind jackets very much in evidence. However we had got by with them on our weekend trips, and not always in the best of weather. And in addition Betty and Pete each had a 'Float Coat'. These were a Col Putt invention, made from two layers of japara about 45 cm x 1 m, sewn together with ribbing spaced about 5 cm apart. The 5 cm wide pockets were stuffed with kapok and a collar plus arm holes were sewn along one side. They fitted under the arms, down to below waist level and buttoned up in front. They kept your body warm, could be used as a mattress and provided flotation on river trips.

This left food. On the Easter trip we had ascertained that the Chalet had a small shop where limited supplies could be purchased and/or ordered. We decided on taking the bulk of our food supplies and relying on the Chalet mainly for meat and veggies. The girls did a sterling job in sorting us guys in this department.

Powdered milk in those days tasted pretty terrible, however we had heard about a special Nestle 'export' product that was not available on the domestic market. By dint of an inordinate amount of time and much skulduggery we managed to obtain an ample supply. When we got to the snow we found that it was a quantum improvement in taste; its only disadvantage was its almost total insolubility in water, whether cold, warm or hot. The best procedure for overcoming this minor disadvantage was to mix the powder with a lot of sugar, make a thick paste and then dilute it down.

The food, comprising copious quantities of barley, flour, sugar, salt, scroggin (a mix of broken biscuits, nuts, dried fruit and sometimes chocolate), dehys (again pretty terrible in those days), packet desserts etc, was packed into a set of 5 gallon (about 25 L and say 25 cm x 25 cm x 40 cm high) cans with circular press top lids to be sent on ahead of us to the Chalet.

Lighting was to be two kerosene hurricane lamps, a carbide lamp, torches and candles. And very luckily we included two folding primus kerosene stoves.

So five people and a mountain of gear assembled at Central Railway Station the Friday evening of the Queen's Birthday weekend of 1953 for the commencement of the Great Adventure. After a very cold overnight run (punctuated by the Admiral getting up regularly to shake the foot warmer, to give it a bit more life), we arrived in Cooma early on the Saturday and were picked up by our hire car. We arrived at Red Hut late on a beautiful morning to find to our great amazement and shock horror, NO SNOW, or at least none near Red Hut. The nearest large areas of skiable snow were a considerable distance up the Summit road and across on the Main Range side of the Snowy River.

Things were a bit chaotic for the first couple of nights as a few additional members from the SBW, who had driven down, dropped in.

We quickly found that Red Hut was a much draughtier place than our Easter sojourn had led us to believe. To some extent this problem was overcome by stuffing newspaper in any cracks we could find in the timber lining. Another difficulty was that the fireplace did not draw well and during the first week appeared to have the interesting characteristic of vacuuming up light snow falls and leaving everything in the 'kitchen' coated with snow. At times the morning inspection seemed to show more snow inside than on the ground outside Red Hut.

In addition, attempts to warm the hut using the fireplace led to partial asphyxiation of the inhabitants. Cooking on it only exacerbated this situation; and trying to chop wood with a blunt axe in the snow added further to the misery. We eventually gave up and blocked off the chimney with a piece of scrap galvanised

iron held down by a heap of granite boulders. After that, cooking (and the only source of heating) was courtesy of our two primus stoves.

We took a thermometer in order to determine just how cold it was. Some interesting numbers were recorded. Heat wave conditions inside Red Hut (+6^{0}C) were reached during daytime on a number of occasions. At night, temperatures generally fell rapidly inside, to near or slightly below freezing and at least once to minus 8^{0}C!

The result was that when inside the hut, unless we were doing something physical, we were generally sitting or lying around on the bunks (since there were no chairs) in our sleeping bags. What with the cold and the physical effort going into skiing (no lifts and kilometres of walking to get to and from the snow in the first week), our appetites increased dramatically.

The cook or cooks worked fully dressed and often with a blanket thrown around their shoulders. Breakfast commenced with porridge (2 x 4 pint billies for the five of us) often served in bed by whoever got up to cook it. This was followed by bacon and bread. Pete remembers drinking the bacon fat when it had cooled but before it had time to congeal, something that in normal circumstances would have made him heave. Lunches were scroggin since we were out skiing most lunch times. On a bad day in the hut it might be soup and scroggin.

Dinners were soup followed by say sausages, spuds and greens if we were lucky, and maybe dessert. We made really good thick soup in batches of about

Peter off to get water in the morning. Note the short stocks and the firefighters mittens.

10 or 15 L in one of the left over 25 L food tins, each batch to last a couple of days. It was based on barley and whatever we could buy or scrounge from the Chalet. In this the Chalet staff were quiet generous, donating bones and occasionally veggies that were deemed to be surplus to their requirements. And an interesting problem was re-heating the soup from par-frozen, without burning it. Gently, very gently was the required approach.

We gathered that Red Hut was typically rented for short periods (as in one or two nights) and never in winter for three weeks at a time. This caused the Chalet staff to view us with some considerable amusement, however they were ever helpful; the manager Vic Onorato particularly so. For instance the Chalet shop was only open limited hours and Vic decreed that as this could present a problem for us (dead right, especially when the weather was bad) the shop would be open to us any time we needed to make purchases. We much appreciated this privilege but made sure that we did not abuse it.

Looking back at it, why the Chalet had guests so early in the season is still a mystery; perhaps they were as naive as we were. At any rate the group of youngies in Red Hut became somewhat of a tourist attraction for them, so we had the odd visitor, especially early on when there was not much snow and people were going for walks rather than skiing.

Early on obtaining water was no great problem. We converted a couple of our 25 L tins to buckets and this became our water supply. At first you simply walked up the road to the soak, broke the ice, filled the bucket by bailing water out with a 4 pint billy and strolled back to Red Hut; at this stage we even used our bushwalking japara buckets. However, as time wore on and the snow built up, things got a little more difficult, particularly when the weather was bad. We found that we had to dig down through up to 1.5 m of snow to get to the water (the soak seemed to drift in each night) then ski back holding the bucket between our legs.

Often, with deep untracked snow and our limited skiing abilities not all of the water made it back to Red Hut. One time, in firm snow conditions, skiing whilst holding the bucket between his legs with both hands, the Admiral can recall not being able to stop when he got back to Red Hut. The result was that he drifted down the road until nature took its course in the form of reduced slope and then he had to get back to the hut.

Washing clothes in these conditions was also somewhat of a challenge. The Admiral made the first attempt by washing a

couple of pairs of underpants. These were hung outside on a piece of rope on a fine but windy day. On return from skiing we found that they had been blown up by the wind and frozen solid. We thought that they looked like chastity belts and gave the Admiral heaps.

Luckily we did not have much rain, so apart from washing clothes the main drying required was for damp socks and mittens. This was sorted by putting them between blankets and sleeping on top of them. If not dry when it came time to put them on again, they were at least warm.

Washing bodies was even more of a challenge. There was a view then among some SBW members, that "bathing weakens you". As none of us were supportive of that theory, we resorted to 'topping and tailing' and the odd shower at the Chalet.

Then there was the greatest challenge, toileting. Some evenings the boys would take one hurricane lantern and wander up the hill, hang it in a snow gum, dig a few holes and perform, while the girls did the same thing with the other hurricane lamp. The magnitude of the challenge increased with the increase in snow cover and the decrease in grassed areas in which to dig. And then there was 'The Blizzard' (see side story in the next issue).

Bev injured both knees in a low speed fall when both her skis splayed out. She was in much pain and had to be assisted back to Red Hut. Betty remembers that in the effort to minister to Bev's injuries, the soup got burned. This was a minor disaster on the food front, as a substantial quantity of ingredients, largely donated by the Chalet, was ruined. Bev's injuries proved to be worse than we at first thought and the net result was that after a day or so she decided to leave, unfortunately earlier than planned.

When it came time for Rosso to leave he found that he had lost his return train ticket. Despite extensive searching by Betty as well as the boys (a 'man's look' is not to be trusted), it failed to come to light. As he had insufficient funds to pay for a return ticket, Betty, the Admiral and Pete chipped in.

This left the Three Musketeers to conduct the retreat from Red Hut at the end of the three weeks. Problem 1 was that after chipping in for Rosso's train ticket and the odd unplanned expense we did not have enough money for the oversnow transport as planned and Problem 2 was that we were going to have to bring out all the communal gear.

With heavy packs and on a beautiful day we set out on our skis for 12 km journey to Smiggin Holes. After numerous stops, we arrived at Betts Camp; whereupon two of the Chalet's oversnows (ex US military tracked vehicles called Weasels) chugged up, returning from Smiggins. They were amazed to see us and asked why we were skiing out. When we told them, they replied "Hell, we would have brought you guys out for free"!

Well, we finally found ourselves just on dark, absolutely exhausted and the only occupants of the Transit Hut at Smiggins. No water was to be had, so with limited fuel and sausages plus spuds on the menu we melted snow, cooked the spuds and then used the well-salted water from cooking the potatoes, to make instant coffee!

Betty had a word or three to say to the guys about the taste of the coffee.

The next day we managed to hitch a ride on a snow plough to Island Bend, then caught the bus to Cooma and thence home by train.

Thus ended a MEMORABLE ADVENTURE.

Pete Stitt wrote part of this story fifty nine years later in August 2012, sitting in Southern Alps Ski Club Lodge at Charlotte Pass, looking across the valley to where Red Hut once stood. It was crushed in the thaw following the record 1964 snow season.

The contrast between then and now is remarkable, accommodation in a warm lodge with en-suite equipped bedrooms, three excellent prepared meals each day, plenty of good wine, virtually ski-in/ski-out and; due to a quantum improvement in equipment, ski lifts and slope grooming, Dot and Pete Stitt (then 77 and 79 years old respectively) could on one good day, ski more vertical distance than any one of us did in three weeks in 1953. No wonder the youngies learn so much faster these days.

Further highlights of the 1953 trip will appear in the next issue of the newsletter.

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Funny Bits

These stories come from John Davis' book A History of the Early Development of Perisher-Smiggins*, published by PHS early in 2018. As John says on page 149:*

Back then too, laughter played an important role in survival, and fortunately there was lots of it, so here are a few stories that made us laugh, that are remembered and printable. Urban myths? No. If I wasn't there, many reliable witnesses were.

Rat in the till

Bush rats caused lots of troubles in the mountains, particularly with foodstuffs, so you learnt to live with them, making sure anything they could eat or dig into was in a tin or rat proof cupboard. Alan Limbrick's ski shop in Alpine Gate at Smiggin Holes in 1962 was a busy little business and after a day's trading was often a social gathering place for Smiggins workers, with many impromptu parties born in Alan's shop. First thing Alan would do when the shop closed after a busy day would be to remove the cash drawer, that's what it was, just a drawer under the counter and he would stash it away wherever he kept it. Whether he was suffering stress from this day's trading, or had a little too much to drink at the party that was now in full swing he forgot to do it.

Next morning he found the Smiggins rats had expensive tastes, chewing, mixing and scattering every note of every denomination all over the drawer, the floor and the shop. The manager of the Bank of NSW did not respond too well at first to the rat infested box of coloured paper presented to him by Alan, but after enjoying the story several times and accepting the figures of the day's trading, credited Alan's account with an acceptable amount.

Mummy didn't even get on

The first couple of years after the Perisher chairlift was built it was in operation during summer holiday times for tourist rides. This particular day was not too busy and the two operators at bottom station, with another guy loading the return riders on the top, had no trouble with its operations. Late in the day, the boys at bottom station noticed an approaching chair with only one passenger. As it got closer they could see the occupant was a small child they had loaded earlier along with his Mother. When the little one got off, naturally he was asked where his mother was and the boy replied "Mummy got off". All hell broke loose of course, Mum was found, fortunately unharmed, still trying to extract herself from the safety net under the deck of top station. It looked like the top chairlift operator was distracted and missed seeing her successfully loaded and the lady, making sure her boy was secure, was not properly seated when the chair reached the edge of the deck, and plop! Over she went, into the net. It could have been serious but "Mummy got off" became part of Perisher folklore.

DIARY DATES

PHS AGM
Saturday 16 February 2019
NPWS Jindabyne 2.00 pm

Australian Alpine & Snowsports History Association (AASHA) Conference
3-5 May 2019
Ben Lomond (60 km from Launceston)

Annual Dinner
Sunday 9 June 2019
Guest Speaker
Walter Costanzo
'An insight into Guthega development'
Marritz Hotel, Perisher Valley

Hello in the Snow
Tuesday 6 August 2019
Marritz Hotel, Perisher Valley

Perisher Cup
Saturday 14 September 2019
Teams of four
(Alpine, XC, jump)
Sponsored by Perisher Resort and SLOPES

Season's Greetings to all