

# PERISHER HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Issue 4 Winter 2010

## Billy Ditmar – reflections of a Perisher ski instructor

After a walk with Billy Ditmar and her husband, Uwe, in Kosciuszko National Park last summer, Gil Boehm wrote:

We sat on a large rock looking back towards Sponar's Chalet, resting on the way to Andrew's Lookout. "That's where they used to ski, up there behind Sponar's, in the 60s", said Billy. Did you ever ski there Billy? "Heck yeah, when the damn snow was so thick on the road up to Perisher, they used to bring us instructors down in the oversnow vehicles and we'd meet the tourists as they got off the buses. Yeah, we had 45 students and one instructor trying to teach them skiing. They had never seen snow before! Wow was that funny."

Billy Ditmar, who is German by birth, but has lived in Aspen, Colorado, for almost 40 years now, came to Australia in 1960 and made his way to Perisher Valley, as did so many other immigrants of his time. Did he like it? Is the sky blue? He instructed in Perisher for 10 seasons till 1970 and each summer went to Aspen. One northern hemisphere summer Billy decided to stay in Aspen and the rest is history. Perisher now sees Billy in our summer, usually once a year when he

returns to these mountains he loves and catches up with some of the best friends he ever had.

One of Billy's old mates is Franz Pichler, who, along with Christian Keller from Switzerland, still instructs each season and is now enjoying his 43rd consecutive winter here! When these two guys get together with their mutual friend Uwe Boehm, who lived in Perisher Valley for over 40 years, the tales begin. If today's young instructors think they are having a good time and maybe even getting into a bit of mischief, they should listen to a few of these guys' memories.



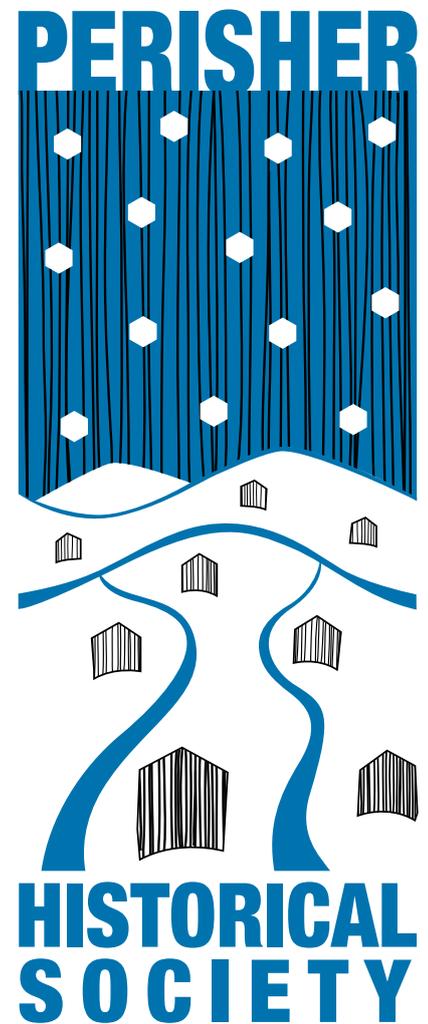
*Billy and Uwe in Jindabyne reminiscing about past times (photo by Gil Boehm).*



BILL DITTMAR

UWE BOEHM

*Billy and Uwe as members of the Ski School Perisher in 1966 (source: Ski Australia, July 1966).*



## Contents

- Billy Ditmar – reflections of a Perisher ski instructor
- Handmade skis by Ted Winter
- The Ullr Story
- The PHS 3rd Annual Dinner
- 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of The Man From Snowy River Hotel
- Managers and Owners of The Man from Snowy River Hotel
- Making History
- Denis Plummer - Vale
- A History of the Early Development of Perisher-Smiggin
- Congratulations to Australian Winter Olympians and Paralympians
- Hello in the Snow
- New Members
- Front Valley in the late 1950s

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# Handmade skis by Ted Winter

This article was transcribed from handwritten notes provided by Neil Roberts that accompanied a pair of handmade skis he donated to the PHS and is as much a testimony to the late Ted Winter, who passed away last year aged 100, as a history of the skis that Ted made for Neil. The skis and poles are now exhibited in the new display cabinet in the Perisher Skitube building. The PHS would like to thank Neil for his kind donation.

In the 1950s people idolised champion sports people whatever their sport. Ted Winter was a champion in the true sense and a great all-rounder. Academic, poet, writer, bushwalker, skier, you name it and Winter met the challenge.

I first met Ted at his home on Oliver's Hill, Frankston, Victoria in 1954. There, a group of Physical Education Teachers had gathered to meet this unique man of the mountains. He was there for an introduction to ski touring. This was skiing of a different kind, involving rough camping, lugging heavy loads, and man-handling sledges over the Snowy Mountains. This was hard labour on skis yet the prospect excited us all; we couldn't wait to get into it! Most of us had never seen a ski up close, remembering that this was a time well before polymers and lamination, so what would we ski on, where would they come from, and how much would it all cost? Ski gear was never cheap and teachers' salaries never high.

So said Ted, "we make our own" and "out of hickory". Here we begin the first lesson. However, before Ted struck a blow he

described where we were going, what we were doing and what other equipment was needed – boots, bindings, seal skins, sleds, harness and provisions. Being a teacher he omitted nothing.

The shaping of the skis was fascinating and they turned out to be a cross between a downhill and a cross-country or langlauf ski: long, strong, pliable and almost 'bullet proof'.

Ted took a pair of planks and with the aid of a spoke-shave, a rasp, a plane and sandpaper he shaped them into an approximate profile, cut the shape of the tips and tapering the rear ends. He then cut a splice with a hand saw (in the way you would cut the last slice of a loaf of bread) from the heel up towards the back of the toe plate and forming an exaggerated camber he glued the splice in position. This camber which was centrally placed served to take the body weight allowing the ski to flatten and to remain level over its entire length and no further. In other words the skis could not 'bottom out' past the horizontal position when weight was applied.

The next task was to steam up the toes. This was done by placing the tips in a metal steam box (for how long I can not remember), bent to shape and cooled suddenly, creating permanent upturned ends. A little more shaping produced a holding knot in the very tip of the ski to hold a loop on the end of a seal skin strip which allowed the skier to walk uphill. It was a tedious business taking the seal skins on and off to meet the changes in terrain but it served to improve your 'stepping up' skills.

All that remained then was to cut a cross and a groove or channel on the bottom under surface of the ski to prevent 'clogging' and

insert steel edges in place which were anchored by counter sunk screws. A foot plate and a clip forward of the foot plate and the ski was ready for bindings. These Kandahar bindings were based on a spring tension system which could be used in a 'heel free' or 'heel clamped' position according to what you were doing.

I remember Ted giving me these 'boards' free of charge and they served me well. They were excellent for our needs in these rugged mountains and 'ahead of their time' as a forerunner to some of the sophisticated models seen today. Modern day cross-country skiers would probably view these 'old things' with horror – their length, weight and difficulty in turning etc but they did the job splendidly for the likes of us. Admittedly, turning was awkward for the novice; however, they were immensely strong. Ted put us through our paces – step turns, snow ploughing, side stepping, herring bone stepping, the lot.

Though very thorough with the task at hand, Ted had the habit of taking things for granted, e.g. he assumed after a while that I was managing quite well, well enough to attempt the long 'down hill' challenge. Talk about a baptism of fire! We climbed to the top of the Grey Mare Range, turned, removed our skis and with the words "follow me!" we launched into a 'hell ride'. The downhill speed was amazing and in no time Ted was out of sight and having leapt over the roof of the Grey Mare Hut was hammering down the ridge in front of us, screaming like a banshee and pelting down at a cool 80 m.p.h. I was 300 metres back in petrified pursuit, lurching back and forth, feet 5-feet apart, totally out of control, with no visibility, flying

over the roof and onto the deadly ridge which dropped as if into a chasm. The end was obvious. After five punishing somersaults, I finally came to a halt landing right at Ted's feet. Shaking and bruised I struggled to stand up.

A stern unsympathetic stare was accompanied by the terse words, "now climb up and do it again, only this time tuck one knee in behind the other and leave it there, stay upright and try to read the terrain".

The next attempt was different altogether. Effort number one proved to be the shortest yet the best lesson I've had at anything. Only Ted Winter could have administered it.

Incidentally, the fact that these old skis remained intact is testimony to the way in which they were made. That primitive steam-box on Oliver's Hill was certainly part of the life that passed before me during that frantic first descent! Thanks Ted.



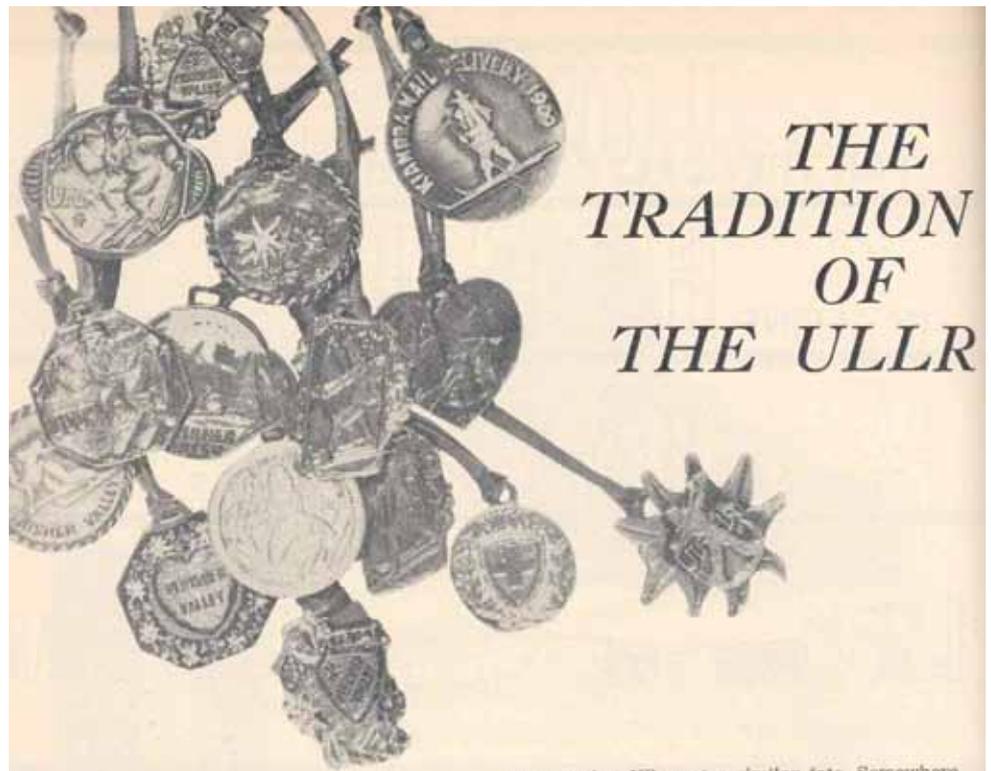
Neil Roberts' skis made by Ted Winter (photo by Monica Stewart).



Metal edges fixed in short lengths into a rebated wooden ski base (photo by Dave Woods).

## The Ullr Story

If you have ever wondered about the Tradition of the Ullr, then you may take delight in reading the article prepared by Wendy Cross for the 1966 (July) Ski Australia magazine and reprinted below.



### THE TRADITION OF THE ULLR

By WENDY CROSS

WHEN I first went skiing six years ago, one of the first things I noticed about skiers was that many of them wore on their parkas or pants quaint little medallions bearing the mysterious letters ULLR.

To begin with, I assumed that the medallions had some religious significance. However a closer inspection showed that the figures engraved on them had more of a pagan, than a Christian aspect. Then someone told me they were skiers' good luck charms. I'd seen them in ski shop windows, so naturally I wanted to rush right off and buy one. Fortunately, a more experienced friend stepped in and explained that according to tradition, Ullrs must never be bought — they must be given to you.

Since that time, I have acquired an Ullr of my own — about which I shall tell you in a moment — and I have been sufficiently intrigued to conduct a little research into the subject. Here are my findings.

First, there is an air of mystery surrounding the wearing of Ullrs and indeed, the origin of Ullr himself. As far as I can ascertain, Ullr was one of the old Norse gods, and was a big, burly bearded gentlemen (weren't they all?) whose speciality was looking after skiers who had to make long journeys. As everyone knows, skis went out of fashion from the time of the gods until the 1860s, and it therefore seems safe to

assume that Ullr met a similar fate. Somewhere during the last century, though, he came back into fashion. Just when, or why, skiers began wearing the medallions, is something I cannot discover. I would like to hear from anyone who can shed some light on this.

Anyway, some people say that the letters ULLR have little to do with the Norse god, and are actually the initials of four words in ancient Germanic which, when translated, mean, "There Can Be No Sin on the Mountain". Interpreted, this would mean that as long as you're above four-thousand feet, Jack, anything you do is O.K.! The ski instructor's version runs something more like, "Dollink, vy are you not Nize to me?"

As I was told six years ago, you must never buy your own Ullr. It must be given to you by a friend or a lover. Ideally, it should be given as a gift of love. Unfortunately, in our beloved mountains it is more often given as a gift of seduction. It was in this way that I acquired my own. The whole situation revolved around a black and white calfskin rug, but more than that I am not prepared to say, except that the gift was in vain.

Ullrs can be worn almost anywhere. Mostly they are attached to the zipper on ski pants, but they go equally well on parkas. Women wear them on bracelets or round their necks on chains. Men attach them to key rings and even use them as bottle openers.

But whether they really work is another thing. All I know is that I have been wearing mine for five seasons and so far, I have not hurt myself. Except on one occasion three years ago, when I strained an elbow. I was NOT wearing my Ullr that day. #

48 Ski Australia, July, 1966

## The PHS 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Dinner

Riding on the success and popularity of the previous two dinners, the Society hosted its third annual event on the Saturday evening of the June long weekend. Eighty-eight guests enjoyed a four-course meal at Snow Gums Restaurant in Perisher Valley and were entertained by guest speaker Ross Martin – Australia's cross-country skier at the 1968 Winter Olympic Games in Grenoble, France. Ross gave an entertaining account of the development of cross-country skiing in Australia and paid particular homage to those people who were instrumental in keeping competitive cross-country skiing alive and assisting athletes. With the growing interest in alpine skiing, the 1960s and 1970s were a difficult period in the sport's history. Ross noted that lack of support for his sport from some quarters was a great motivation for him to train even harder as an athlete.

PHS President – Philip Woodman – was Master of Ceremonies

and acknowledged all those winter athletes, Olympians and Paralympians, who had been nurtured on the ski slopes and cross-country trails around the Perisher Range. In particular, he welcomed Zali Steggall, the other Australian Winter Olympian at the dinner. Zali's bronze in the Women's Slalom at Nagano in 1998 was the first individual medal won by an Australian at the Winter Olympic Games. He also summarised the progress of some of the PHS projects.

Historic video footage of Perisher Valley, Smiggin Holes and Charlotte Pass played throughout the evening provided a wonderful backdrop for reminiscences amongst old friends; one of the reasons why this dinner was such a success.



Guest speaker Ross Martin (centre) with Iain McDonald (left) and Ian Bradley (photo by Chrissie Web).



Some of the 88 guests at the PHS 3rd Annual Dinner at Snow Gums Restaurant. From left to right – Philip Woodman, Lynne Murray-Walker, Fred Murray-Walker, Kaye Russell, Gary Russell, Ashley Blondel, Anne Blondel, Andrew Harrigan, Pam Woodman and Di Brulisauer (photo by Dave Woods).

## 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of The Man From Snowy River Hotel

When Ken Murray built the Sundeck Hotel in Perisher Valley in 1959, his niece Deirde Turner tells us that he was only thinking of building one hotel and one ski tow. However, the success of the venture prompted him to embark on a second hotel and T-bar for the 1960 season. Construction of The Man from Snowy River began on 6 January 1960 and four weeks later the Sundeck was destroyed by fire. So now there were two hotels to build before the snows arrived.

The completion of the hotels was a battle against the elements. Perisher Valley was snowed in nearly two months early (22 April) and a succession of early blizzards continued to build snow depths. Materials were buried several feet down and had to be dug up. The road head remained a mile away at Smiggin Holes and hundreds of tons of timber and other building requisites plus all the hotel equipment and furniture had to be transported over the snow. Four Weasel machines imported for the carriage of guests achieved the miracle. They even hauled in three emergency generators weighing five tons each.

The Man from Snowy River was opened on schedule on 25 June 1960, with 39 rooms, 39 bathrooms, a swimming pool in front and a tennis court. The opening was quite something: employees of Architon Constructions, the Cooma builders, many still in their work

gear, mountain staff, hotel guests and as many lodge people as could get in packed the place. The boilers and heating had been commissioned on that day and as the building warmed up snow and ice that had been built into its construction since 22 April began to melt. The party raged on into the night but the next day hung over construction workers and staff had to set to repairing water and party damage.

The new Sundeck opened on 30 July – just three weeks late.

The first manager of The Man was Fritz Feiersinger and when he left to build Marritz with his wife, Margo, he was followed by Ken Murray's sister and brother-in-law, Gwen and Alan Cooper, who were at The Man until the mid-seventies. The lounge at The Man was ideal for parties, and guest and visitors had many interesting and fun nights with fashion parades put on by Gwen Cooper and entertainment provided by Ken Rouse and his band, Fritz playing his beloved harp and Hans Weikl with his squeeze box.

Since 1987, Ann and Brian Smith have managed The Man for the owners, the Bart, Breuer, Burger and Lendvay families. The 50th Year Anniversary Celebrations were held at The Man on 26 June 2010.



*The Man from Snowy River Hotel – the second oldest hotel in Perisher Valley - celebrated its 50th Anniversary in June 2010.*



*Tunnel entrances like this one to The Man Hotel were a common feature for many buildings during the 1964 epic snowseason.*



*Sobriety and decorum at The Man from Snowy River Hotel (Cooper Collection).*



*Gwen and Alan Cooper and their staff – early days at The Man Hotel (Cooper Collection).*

## Managers and Owners of The Man from Snowy River Hotel

Long term manager, Ann Smith, provided this chronology of owners and managers of 'The Man' since it was built in 1960.

Fritz Feiersinger was the first manager in 1960 and 1961 for the owner Ken Murray, and then Gwen and Alan Cooper from 1963 to 1974. When Ken Murray sold the hotel to Kerry Packer, Mr Stan Mouchka was the manager until the current owners, the Bart, Breuer, Burger and Lendvay families, bought the hotel in 1978. At this juncture Chris Brown was the manager for the hotel from 1978 to 1982, then Joe Goddard in 1983, and Chris Brown again in 1984 and 1985. In 1986 Dick and Julie Buelow were managers with Brian and Ann Smith as assistants, until Brian and Ann took over as managers in 1987.

Brian and Ann Smith have been at the hotel for 25 of the 50 years, mostly as managers. Ann was also staff for Chris Brown from 1979 to 1981 and lived in staff quarters for the 1977 season.



*Smorgasbord (Cooper Collection).*

## Making History

According to the minutes of the NSW Ski Association dated 27 October 1981, Philip Woodman (current PHS President) reported on the success of the Ski Industry's opening night press conference which was attended by Sir William McKell KCMG KstJ Premier of NSW 1941-1947 and 12th Governor General of Australia (and first Australian to hold this office). The night was probably in early October 1981 and related to the 75th anniversary of the first reservation of 100 square miles centred on Mt. Kosciuszko and called Snowy Mountains National Chase. This early gazettal was a precursor to the Kosciusko State Park which Sir Willaim's government created in 1944 and expanded in area to 1.38 million acres; a great legacy and, as he told Philip on the night, the achievement of which he was most proud. In 1967 the Kosciusko State Park became the Kosciusko National Park when the NSW government created the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

The photograph below shows Philip (left) in the company of Sir William McKell (middle) and Kurt Lance – all three have played pivotal roles in the development of NSW snow sports.



## Display Cabinet on Show

A special thank you is in order to Pam and Philip Woodman for the sterling effort they put into the display cabinet in the Perisher Skitube building. The cabinet was completed and installed by Jindabyne Joinery in late June, but it still needed Pam to 'weave her magic' to turn a wide range of PHS donated items into a great exhibition. Thanks also to Perisher Blue for helping to transport the display items from Ku-ring-gai Alpine Lodge to the Skitube building, and to Jennifer Smart who assisted with signage and additional creativity. Steve Blight of Jindabyne Joinery also gave up some of his Sunday morning to assist with the fitting.

The cabinet currently displays a good cross-section of memorabilia and themes associated with early skiing around the Perisher resorts and at Charlotte Pass. Items include Bill Day's 1960 Olympic blazer from Squaw Valley, Craig Branch's 2002 Olympic downhill ski uniform from Salt Lake City, wooden cross country skis handmade by Ted Winter, a 'nut-cracker' used to attach skiers to a rope tow, trophies, badges, old tickets, skates and photographs.

As more materials are donated to the PHS, it is intended to change the display from time to time during the season. The cabinet also provides an opportunity to promote the PHS and to link themes and stories back to the PHS website. The prospect of screening historic videos is currently being explored.



*A 'nutcracker' on display. This medieval looking device included a belt worn by the skier to which a metal fastener (nutcracker) was attached. The skier would clamp themselves to the rope-tow, hold on for dear life and release to get off at the other end (photo by Dave Woods).*



*The display case with down-lights, glass shelving and fixtures installed (photo by Dave Woods).*



*Photographs, badges and some of Bill Day's trophies on display (photo by Dave Woods).*

# Denis Plummer - Vale

By Alan Davis

Denis Plummer was someone who made a great contribution to Perisher during the 27 years (1975-2002) he worked at the resort. Sadly Denis passed away in December 2009. Following is a brief summary of his contribution to the resort over those years.

Denis and his wife Lynda first came to the area from Wollongong in April 1975 as part of an intended working holiday around Australia. The Snowy Mountains was their first stop; a 'stop' which lasted 27 years! On arriving at Perisher, Denis was offered a role as transport driver and mechanic. In May 1976, he was promoted to the position of Mountain Office Supervisor.

In 1977 Denis was again promoted and became Area Manager of Centre Valley and he continued in this role for two years before taking on the position of Area Manager at Smiggin Holes in 1979. Denis remained in this role until he retired in 2002.

Before his arrival in Perisher, Denis worked as a motor mechanic and Manager at Dwyers Holden dealership in Wollongong. During his time at Smiggin Holes, he trained many mechanical fitters, passing on his knowledge and trusting that they would care as much about the area as he did.

The many lift operators who were also trained by Denis understood that teamwork and having pride in your workplace made skiing

and snowboarding a far more enjoyable experience for the general public.

Smiggin Holes was a very big part of Denis's life - an area of the mountain he cared for greatly, taking ownership and pride in his section of the resort. Denis would spend many hours before lifts opened and again after they closed to ensure his section of the resort was as good as he could possibly make it.

Denis will be greatly missed by all those who were fortunate enough to be part of his life.

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## A History of the Early Development of Perisher-Smiggin

After six years of putting pen to paper (and fingers to keyboard), John Davis has produced a personal account of how the Perisher and Smiggin Holes ski resort areas evolved through the 1950s to the early 1970s. In his book, John explores the camaraderie and some of the characters who were challenged in the very early days by few roads, limited transport, lack of communication and supplies that often had to be hauled in by pack and sled.

This history reflects John's own experiences. John and wife Pat were ski tourists in 1955 and 1956. These early sojourns in the mountains were life-changing for them both. Not only did they fall in love with the

Snowy Mountains but an offer by Sverre Kaaten to lease the newly constructed Perisher Tow Hut and Rope Tow in 1957 was too good to refuse. And so, settled in their mountain hut, greeting guests, cooking meals, cranking engines and digging out lift-lines became the new way of life for this couple, who went on to be an integral part of the ever-changing scene around Perisher Valley and Smiggin Holes.

Congratulations to John for his invaluable contribution to Perisher history and special congratulations to both John and Pat on their 56th wedding anniversary which coincided with the release of the book.



*Pat and John with Ullr (photo from John's book).*

# Congratulations to Australian Winter Olympians and Paralympians

Congratulations to all the Australian athletes who competed in the 21st Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver, Canada. The years of hard work were worth it!

Special congratulations to Winter Olympians Torah Bright (Gold – Snowboard Half-pipe), Lydia Lassila (Gold – Freestyle Aerials) and Dale Begg-Smith (Silver – Freestyle Moguls) for their medal winning performances, and to Winter Paralympians Marty Mayberry (Silver - Downhill), Cameron Rahles-Rahbula (Bronze - Slalom and Bronze - Super Combined) and Jessica Gallagher (Bronze - Slalom visually impaired).

Following her outstanding gold medal performance, Torah Bright has signed on to be Perisher resort ambassador for the next two years. Torah will become the face of some of Perisher's advertising and promotional campaigns, representing the

resort where she first started snowboarding and developed her skills.

Congratulations also to Carla Zijlstra for her splendid commentary on speed skating for Channel 9. Carla is a three-time Olympic speed skater for Holland and the partner of Anthony Evans, Australia's own three-time cross-country Olympian. As members of Cooma Ski Club they telemark the Perisher resort and ski the cross-country trails around Perisher Valley with their daughters Zarna and Abbey.

A celebrity appearance by Grant Turnbull showed him in rude health once again - pictured here with Chris Brangwin of Munjarra.



## Hello in the Snow

Down in Perisher for her annual ski holiday week Pam Woodman thought it would be good to gather up any Society members and friends for a drink and thus 'Hello in the Snow' was born last year. A repeat performance this year on Thursday 12 August during Nordic Race Week drew a crowd of thirty at the new Curve Bar in the Perisher Centre. Wonderful to see Myrna Burke of Warrugang, a familiar face from Perisher Ski Association and NSW Ski Association days.

## New Members

The PHS extends a warm welcome to the following new members who have joined since the last newsletter was published in December 2009.

David Hogg  
Andrew Horsley  
IMBAC Lodge  
Ross Martin & Family\*  
Martin Pitt  
Bob Riches  
Peter Ward & Leslie Ludwig\*\*

*\*10 year family membership*

*\*\*5 year family membership*



## Front Valley in the late 1950s

This image was given to the PHS by John Green of Merriment (cousin of Philip Woodman) showing the No.1 T-Bar at Perisher Valley in 1957 or 1958. Tickets were sold in the building until the shed was later extended to the right which contained a shop, office and ticket window. To buy tickets you skied up a ramp covered with snow and tickets were passed through the window. The big skill was then to turn around without trampling on the skis of others as the ramp wasn't wide enough; this was a difficult task for beginners.

Now project over 50 years later and this frame would include the Village 8 Express and Village Quad Express Chairlift, Skitube building, Perisher Centre, Perisher Manor, The Man from Snowy River Hotel, Fire Brigade Station, Ambulance Station, Catholic Church, a bitumen carpark and thousands of people on what is now known as Front Valley. How times have changed.