

PERISHER HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Issue 10 Winter 2013

Life Above the Snowline

Another story of life and work in Perisher.

Uwe and Gil Boehm

By Gil Boehm

Uwe arrived from Germany in April 1960 and, after a year in Mt Isa, began travelling around Australia on his BMW 500 motor cycle. He rode into Perisher Valley in October 1961, noticed a new timber lodge called Eiger Chalet, and continued up to Charlotte Pass where he saw a 'D' (Deutschland) on a small VW beetle.

Feeling a little homesick, he approached the family playing nearby and there began Uwe's life in the Snowy Mountains. Gunter (Garry) Fischer, owner and builder of Eiger, offered him lodging and some work.

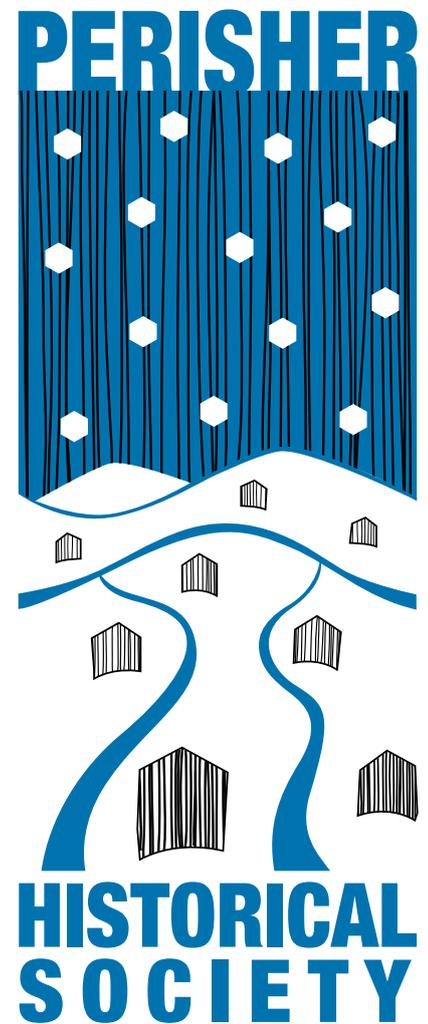
Uwe began his working life in Perisher as a labourer at Eiger and later at The Man from Snowy River Hotel, Marritz and Corroboree Lodge.

During the 1960s, Uwe worked as a ski instructor for Perisher as well as waiter/general hand at Eiger in the evenings. In summer he instructed in St Moritz, Switzerland, which enabled him to visit his family in Germany.

In 1972, Uwe took on the management of the White Spider Restaurant, which had been operating for only one season. With no experience as a chef, and little in a restaurant, he amazingly built the White Spider into the popular and well known restaurant it remains to this day.

In 1973 Gil (Lethbridge) obtained a position as a housemaid in the Eiger Chalet, having just returned from 3 years in Europe. One year had been in Zurich, Switzerland, so the name 'Eiger' had attracted her. With little or no experience in hospitality (she had been a teacher), she was quite petrified of Uwe, the 'boss' in the White Spider, who would follow the girls around to make sure they set the tables correctly.

This fear was quickly overcome, however, and Uwe and Gil became friends, eventually marrying in 1980. From 1974 till 1978 Gil lived in Canberra (and later Cooma) working as a teacher during the week and in the lodge and restaurant at weekends.



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In 1979 Uwe became a one-third partner in the Eiger Chalet, and Uwe and Gil managed the lodge from that year until 2006, when they sold their share in Eiger. After 27 years as managers, they have wonderful memories of and friendships with many loyal guests and staff.

Uwe and Gil have two sons, Kent, born in 1981 and Byron, born in 1986. Both boys grew up with the beautiful Kosciuszko

National Park as their backyard, and both still love the snow and Perisher.

In 2011 Eiger celebrated its 50th birthday. At the June celebration, Uwe and Gil were delighted to meet again many of the long time guests of Eiger. One of them, now 85, began skiing and staying at Eiger when she was 39 years old.

The Boehms are regularly seen in Perisher. Gil worked as a

Mountain Host for two seasons and works each year at the Snowy Mountains of Music Festival. She says, "it's very hard to stop the people contact and after so many years I still love that."

Skiing is still a very big part of their lives. Uwe has also built himself a small aircraft in which he flies over the snowfields checking out snow conditions from the air!



The Boehms (left to right): Byron, Kent, Uwe and Gil, still enjoying Perisher after all these years (Boehm collection).

Don Skinner

The following letter was received by the PHS from Don Skinner who worked for a short time at both The Chalet and Hotel Kosciusko. Don now resides in Calgary, Alberta, but this short note is typical of the sentiments shared by people who worked in and visited the mountains in earlier times.

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Email donsk@shaw.ca

Perisher Historical Society

Notes from Don Skinner re his time at Kosciusko

Worked at Chalet, Charlottes Pass in 1948 for a short time.
Returned in 1949 & worked for winter & spring seasons at
Hotel Kosciusko & became Head Waiter.

Memories of playing chimes in hallways to alert guests for
breakfast

Being taught to starch shirts for black tie dress of head
waiter by the oldest employee of hotel who ran the laundry
& was in charge of the female employees floor. She was a
kind soul & when holidaying in Sydney had to do the
journey in two days due to change in altitude.

Memories of the bus trip from Cooma & the character who
drove the bus & stopping at Jindabyne for refreshment.
It was a lovely area & wonderful tales of the early settlers.
Spring at Kosciusko, snow daisies, & lovely colours of the
snow gum bark, plus that wonderful alpine air.

Of Danny Coleman & his wild skiing techniques & his sheer
joy for life.

Of watching overweight lady in jodphurs bringing small
horse to its knees when being helped to mount him.

Of being 20 years old & learning all about life.

*I dearly hope my old mate Teddy Burke happens
to see this. Best regards, Don Skinner*



Teddy Burke, George ? and Don Skinner
out front of the Hotel Kosciusko (Don
Skinner collection).



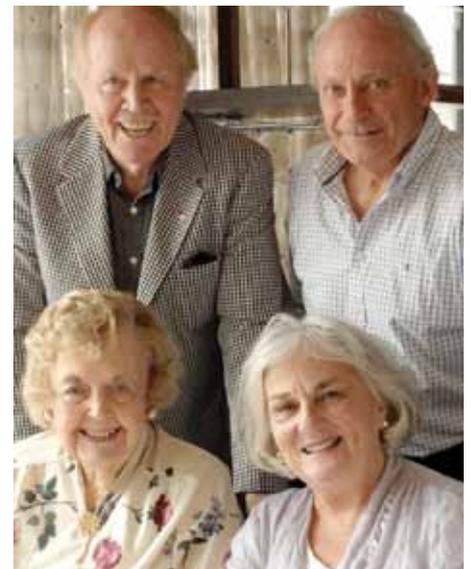
Don on Alpine View with the Kerry
Course descending Mt Sunrise in the
background (Don Skinner collection).

Lunch with Perisher Pioneers

A short article about Perisher stalwarts Fritz and Margo Feiersinger is planned for a future edition of the PHS Newsletter, but in the meantime PHS President and Secretary, Philip and Pam Woodman, can attest that both are in fine form after lunching with them in Sydney earlier this year.

For those less familiar with the Feiersinger's, Fritz was the first manager of the Man from Snowy River Hotel in 1960 before taking up his own Perisher venture with the building of Marritz in 1962. The name Marritz was created by combining their first names – **Margo** and **Fritz**.

A graduate of the Maria Theresa Hotel in Innsbruck, Austria, Fritz used his European experience to raise the standard of accommodation in the snowfields and set the benchmark for high quality cuisine. In the early 1980s Fritz, in partnership with developer Warren Anderson, won the contract to build Blue Cow Resort (Anderson was replaced by Transfield shortly afterwards). In 1988 Fritz was also co-developer of the Salzburg Apartments in Perisher. Fritz now divides his time between Austria and Australia.



Left to right: Fritz Feiersinger, Philip Woodman, Margo Feiersinger and Pam Woodman.



Fritz and his Tyrolean harp in 1961 at the 'The Man'. Fritz's musical talents were a feature of many a night's entertainment at venues across Perisher Valley. Accompanying Fritz on the squeeze-box is Hans Weikl with Peter Salter (Munjarra) immediately behind the musicians. Peter's wife Mary is to his left and to Peter's right, holding the glass, is Jenelle Brangwin, wife of Chris Brangwin (Munjarra) who took the photograph. Don Wills (Munjarra) is behind Peter.

Perisher Cup – Are You Ready?

If not, get your club organised and form a team or perhaps join a composite team.

**RACE DAY
2013
Saturday
14 September
2013**

**Contact Philip Woodman
for details on 0488 159 888**

**Entry will be on-line via
the PHS website.**

Highway to Heaven – book launched, mission accomplished!

By the end of 2012, it was evident that the long awaited book on the history of the resorts accessed by the Kosciuszko Road was nearing completion and that the publication process was in full swing: the draft was being finalised and the last of the images being chased up. A tight schedule for design, production and printing for *Highway to Heaven – A History of Perisher and the Ski Resorts Along the Kosciuszko Road* by Peter Southwell-Keely culminated in the official launch at the PHS Sixth Annual Dinner at Marritz Alpine in Perisher on Sunday 9 June 2013...and what a launch it was!

One-hundred and eleven guests attended the dinner, many drawn to the occasion by the book launch. Newly-arrived 'Marritz Alpine' managers, Simone Beilicz and Luke Downey, and their staff rose to the challenge of catering to this sell-out function with exceptional food and service.

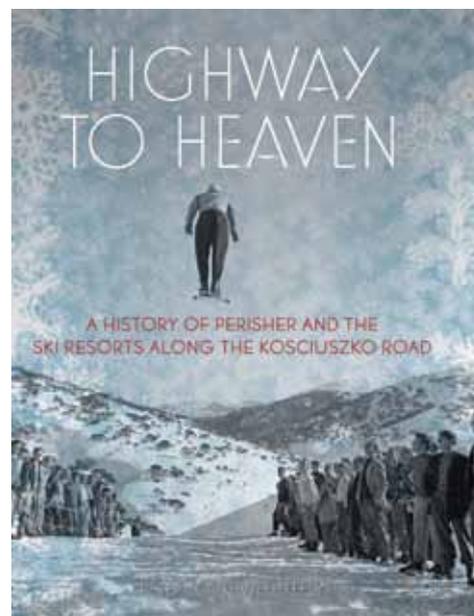
The book was launched by the local Member for Monaro and

Perisher skier, John Barilaro MP. Both he and the Minister for Environment and Heritage, the Hon. Robyn Parker MP recognised the indelible contribution snowsports have made, and continue to make, to the Perisher area.

Soon Peter was at the end of a long line of eager purchasers who wanted signed copies. Peter also gave a presentation with pictures of the developing resort areas and some of their well-known personalities.

Highway to Heaven is a 260-page book with over 400 photographs. As well as chapters about each of the resort areas linked by the Kosciuszko Road, it includes chapters on Australia's first ski troops, ski patrols, ski jumping, NSW Snowsports, cross-country skiing, snowfield personalities and the author's look into the future.

Extensively indexed and referenced, *Highway to Heaven* is the first publicly available history of this large, popular and



significant part of Kosciuszko National Park. The book will not only satisfy snowsports enthusiasts and those affiliated with the resorts along the Kosciuszko Road, but also history buffs and those who have an interest in the Snowy Mountains region and the Australian Alps in general.

The PHS Committee and Members would like to thank Peter Southwell-Keely for his commitment and enthusiasm. His offer to write the book, which he did pro bono, came hard on the heels of the publication of his history of his own club, Kosciuszko Alpine Club (*Out on the Tops – The Centenary of the Kosciuszko Alpine Club*). We also benefited from Peter's experience with *Out on the Tops* by using the same team and publication process that made his first book such a success. This relationship has undoubtedly provided us with a first-class and attractive product.

While Peter has acknowledged the many people who have been involved with the book, we would like to offer special thanks to Philip and Pam Woodman (a bit of everything), Judy Thomson (editing and proofing), Di Dennison (editing and proofing) and Victoria Jefferys (production).



Left: The author of *Highway to Heaven*, Peter Southwell-Keely, signing a copy of his book for Jenny Kennedy of Guthega Alpine Hotel (photo by Dave Woods).

Financial support for the book was kindly provided by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and Perisher Blue P/L and the PHS Committee would particularly like to thank Andrew Harrigan (NPWS) and Peter Brulisauer (Perisher) from these organisations. And last, but not least, many thanks to Peter's wife Didi, who having just got Peter back from his KAC publication, had to share him for another journey. Again to all, the PHS would like to say thank you.



Dinner guests tune in to Peter's presentation (photo by Dave Woods).



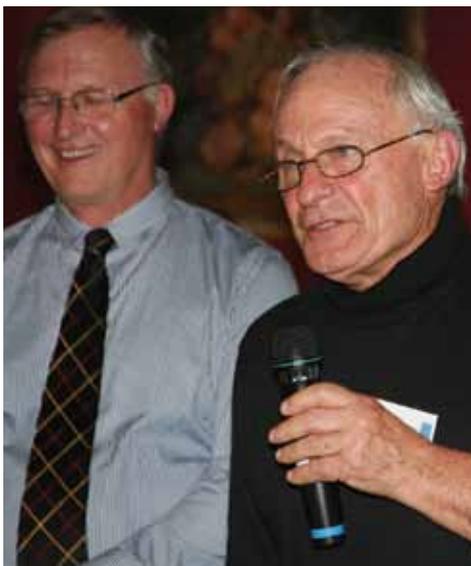
Member for Monaro – John Barilaro MP, officially launching Highway to Heaven (photo by Jan Glover).



Di and Kurt Brulisauer (photo by Jan Glover).



Wendy Cross and Kurt Lance (photo by Jan Glover).



PHS President, Philip Woodman, introducing the author of Highway to Heaven, Peter Southwell-Keely (photo by Jan Glover).



The Minister for Environment and Heritage – Hon. Robyn Parker MP, endorsing the book and the importance of snowsport tourism and resort heritage to NSW (photo by Jan Glover).



Manager of Murriz Alpine, Simone Bellicz, receiving flowers from PHS Secretary, Pam Woodman, for all her efforts (at short notice) to make the Sixth Annual Dinner and Book Launch such a success (photo by Jan Glover).

Monaro Sculptures 2: Monaro Totems, 2008

By Geoff Farquar-Still

On the Monaro plain between Michelago and Bredbo sits a curious grouping of five colourful towers which stand above the silver grey grass of the plain. The towers are composed of an array of carefully assembled gas bottles, all wearing the marks of time and place. The monument is the work of Canberra based sculptor Geoff Farquar-Still.

Trawled from country rubbish tips and recycling centres across the countryside from Braidwood to Cooma, the gas bottles, some dating from the 1950s, bring cheerful colours and the battered patina of domestic life to these found object towers.

Farquar-Still created the work after many years of working with recycled materials. "Initially, as an artist emerging from art school, these materials were cheap and easy to find. Ironically that didn't necessarily make them easy to work with as the objects often have so much character that they overwhelm any attempts to turn them into something else."

It was an exhibition called Sequence at M16 gallery in Canberra that prompted the

idea for the gas bottle towers. "I suddenly realised that I didn't need to change the form, I just needed to get them to work together and suddenly I was off on a whole new journey."

A Monaro resident saw the work and loved it, but it was not until the third person on the night of the opening said "they would look great at your place" that the idea took hold. The following weekend a team appeared on the hill beside the Monaro Highway and the installation took place to the noisy honks and waves of passing motorists.

Initially mistaken for indigenous totems by some enthusiastic locals, the newly installed sculpture had a rocky beginning as the wild Monaro winds took their toll, felling one of the towers overnight, which necessitated some quick remedial work. "It was a great lesson and one that has stood me in good stead as my main practice now involves large scale public art. The towers still need to be straightened from time to time so I always stop and give them a tweak when I pass by", said Geoff.



Monaro Totems by Geoff Farquar-Still, located near 'Ingelara' on the Monaro Highway between Bredbo and Michelago.

The towers provide a point of focus in the landscape and as you come down the hill toward 'Ingelara', the landscape rotates majestically around the towers as though they were a pivot for the setting. "It is a strangely beautiful experience: I love being a passenger on the journey so I can view them."

Hello in the Snow 2013

This year the PHS and Perisher Cross Country (PXC) are joining forces to host this informal get-together in Perisher during Cross Country Ski Week.

Please join us in the bar at Marritz Alpine from 4-6 pm on Tuesday 6 August for drinks and nibbles and a yarn about the 'good old days'.

We'll provide finger food; you pay for drinks and do the talking.

**Any enquiries, please contact Pam Woodman (02) 9488 7475
or [pksadmin@iprimus.com.au](mailto:phsadmin@iprimus.com.au).**

Christian Keller – A Venerable Ski Instructor

By Doug Sanders

This short biography of Christian Keller was written by fellow ski instructor Doug Sanders and published on the Professional Ski Instructors of America – Rocky Mountain website. We thank Doug for permission to reprint this article and for the insight into one of Perisher's most venerable ski instructors.

Christian Keller walks out into the crisp breezy chill of the Snowy Mountains every morning with his eyes twinkling and ears curled back to make room for his glimmering smile. His 30 year old pink fluorescent Solomon boots clank on the metal grate as he walks over the bridge and turns towards me and in his thick Swiss accent he says "Douglas, I think there is knee deep powder today!" He pauses, tilts his head into a schoolboy wink and continues, "you just need to kneel down!" His timing is still perfect even at 77 years.

Keller has a weather-worn face with a freakishly young grin placed on top of it. He conducts himself with ageless grace, small, fit and neat. His movements are no longer fast and reflective, as I am sure they once were, but smart and deliberate. His demeanour is quiet and gentle among his colleagues, and warm and often flirtatious with his clients. I have only seen him in his European team uniform or his Perisher Blue instructors' suit. His hat rests on top of his head above the ears to give him a little extra room to fit his oversized grin.

I wonder if he owns jeans. I don't imagine he has a need for shorts or flip-flops. You see; Keller has done over 50 years of teaching, back to back. To put that into perspective, he's been teaching skiing in different hemispheres continuously since Eisenhower was president. I am not sure this is the picture most of us have when we think about the 'endless winter'. But Christian Keller's

quest has made him an icon and an inspiration for generations of ski instructors.

Keller was born in 1935 in Southern Switzerland near the Italian border. The border was his family's life. His father was a customs agent and it was war in Europe in those days. His family moved every three years. "We were like Gypsies", Keller jokes. His father taught him to ski as many families would have then. Keller took to skiing for fun and for sport. Then, just as now he skied for love not competition. "I was very slow", Christian joked about his ski racing. He skied with boyhood friends: "In those days we could ski rather than do gymnastics for school sports. So I would ski, unless the weather was bad out."

At the end of his youth, his family moved back to southern Switzerland near the Italian border. This is where he would end school and start his magical career. "That was our playground. Sometimes we skied one hour to school. We would walk up the hill, then down the other side to the school." His skis were made of wood with a leather strap. There were two metal pins in the front to hold his boot on top of the ski. "We used the same leather boots for walking and for skiing. Then, we used the old telemark turn for steering."

Keller left school and became a tradesman in the sheet metal and welding industry for four years. Back then one was required to have a job or a trade before you could become an instructor so you would be able to earn a living.

Keller started teaching skiing in 1958 and did his first back to back winter in Smiggin Holes in 1966 just two years after it opened. Then "Smiggins" as it was known, only had 10 instructors. The Perisher Valley itself was made of several small individual resorts, Smiggins, Perisher, Blue Cow and Guthega.

Keller remembered his first trip across the world to teach down under in 1966. "I flew through Delhi, then Bangkok, then Hong Kong, then over to Sydney." We drove in through Canberra and then on to Cooma. Then I drove through the Old Jindabyne when the dam was being built." That town is now long sunk under a lake with the same name. "We drove up the road toward Smiggins and there was still all the vegetation, the bushes, and the trees, but no snow! I thought gosh, what am I heading for! Then just as we turned the corner into Smiggins, there was snow on the hill. But it was just barely enough to turn a ski!" Smiggins is the lowest of all the now combined Perisher ski resorts. These days it struggles to keep coverage there throughout the Australian season. "It snowed quite a lot more then", Keller remembers.

In the following years Keller settled into the 'back to back' life style. He weathered the worst conditions imaginable. Winds blew off the South Pacific bringing shards of ice that eventually piled into snowfall. He would then trudge back to winter again in the European Alps, where glaciers and small isolated towns locked yet

another season under his belt. He eventually settled in working in St Moritz in the northern hemisphere. I asked exactly when he started there. "Now that is getting personal" he joked while wagging a knotty finger at me. No matter which hemisphere he is in, the attitude is the same, a warm smile each day for anyone that walks up to greet him.

His career down south meandered. After four years in Smiggins he moved over to Perisher, about two kilometres up the road and 100 metres in elevation. This resort offered more terrain. Keller remembers a day in late September racing down the face off the Olympic T-bar. The Olympic T-bar is powered by a small diesel engine that strokes so slowly you can tap your foot to each up and down of the cylinders. Black smoke pours out into crisp air and a dogleg left up the ridge frightens the average skier. It was here that he raced down the face at more than 30 degrees. "It was well groomed and prepared for such an endeavour. I went straight down at 180 kilometres an hour, and then crashed very hard at the bottom near the Sun Valley T-bar. I crashed so hard I broke my skis in half. Then my friend offered me to use his skis to go again. So I did! 140 kilometres an hour then straight down." He did not break the borrowed skis.

There was comradely rivalry between the different ski schools and many of the pioneers that started teaching at adjacent resorts are now among Keller's best friends and his co-workers at the combined Perisher resort. Keller remembers years in which there was so much snow he could jump over the chairlift towers on Mt Perisher some 30 feet in the air. "They would use bulldozers



Christian Keller

to create T-bar tracks, then at night the wind would blow all the snow back in." Other years Keller recalled terrible drought. "At Smiggins we only had a ribbon of snow. A client would go down and turn right, then down again. If they missed the turn to left, they were in the mud!" He laughed. "I remember teaching the sous chef at the Smiggins Hotel one year. She was very tall and it was very warm. She didn't stop and went right over the creek and then slowly rolled back. She landed in the water up to her chest. I ran over to help and she said "no...it's cool in here!"

After 12 years in Perisher Valley, a new ski resort emerged in the area, Blue Cow. Keller moved over to this resort that lay off the back of Perisher and offered longer runs and better beginner terrain. The problem was it had no roads to it. So a tunnel was dug in from the valley far below near Jindabyne all the way up through Perisher Valley, then into the "terminal" at Blue Cow. "At first they couldn't complete the tunnel from Perisher to Blue Cow for trains. They ran diesel buses up the tunnel that year. In the morning it was okay, but by afternoon the smoke was terrible! If a bus broke down, they would use a bulldozer to pull it along the tunnel. It was a terrible smoke."

"After 16 years the wind blew me back to Perisher" Keller says with another glint of his boyish grin. Winds at Blue Cow are often over 100 kph and all lifts (including carpets) go on wind hold.

Keller seems stitched into the fabric of Australian skiing. He would go on to teach generations of skiers. He tells stories of parents dropping children into his lesson saying "Listen to Christian, he taught me how to ski!" Later, that child, all grown up, would repeat the same advice to their child decades later. He still sees people he taught to ski two or more generations ago and they always remember to say 'hi'. "That is very rewarding" he says, full dimples showing.

"Now I even teach beside people I taught to ski over 30 years ago! That is really fun." When asked what he most enjoys about instructing, "There are always challenges to overcome." His eyes widen now. "If I get beginners, that has its challenges. If I get a person that can ski, that too has challenges. I love the freedom and being outside in the air."

Now Christian has logged in over a hundred seasons of full time skiing between Perisher and St Moritz. At an average of 240 days or so a year that puts him over 24,000 days of full time teaching! That is a phenomenal number by any standard, and he shows no sign of slowing down, although he does admit to a little jet lag here and there. When I asked Keller how long he thought he could keep up the perpetual winter he looked at me wryly. "I think I have a few more years to go still. When I can't keep up anymore I may have to become fulltime playboy instead of just a part time one!"

New Members

We are delighted to welcome the following new members and thank them for their support.

Charles Skinner**

Dianne Cree* -
Kosciusko Alpine Club

Janet Dawkins -
Alexandra Lodge

Jenny Barnsley - Kunapipi

Mark Hutchison -
Kosciusko Snow Revellers Club

Perisher Huette

* 5 year membership

** 10 year membership



This photograph shows staff digging out Duplex No. 5 in Perisher Valley back in 1974. The photograph was taken by Olle Hallenborg who now resides in Sweden. Olle said that the three people on the left were all international workers while the guy on the right with the shovel was an Australian nicknamed 'Kidney'. If you know who these individuals might be, please contact the PHS and we'll publish the names in a future edition.

Thredbo Historical Society Mid-Winter Dinner and Book Launch

Thredbo Historical society is proud to launch *Flame of Leviticus* the biography of Kurt Lance AM edited and completed by Clare Chate at the THS Annual Dinner this year. Kurt Lance, the founder of Merit Apparel, has played a major role in alpine skiing and as an advisor on rural fire service and national parks issues.

Miranda Devine, well known journalist and writer on current

affairs, will launch Kurt's biography and Malcolm Milne, Australia's first Alpine World Cup gold medallist, will speak of the impact Kurt had on his skiing career. Randy Wieman, former international Freestyle Champion and Thredbo film producer, will round off the evening with a cameo film of a NPWS sponsored helicopter flight in 2012 over the main range to Kurt's memorable locations.



Kurt Lance

Dinner Details

DATE & TIME: Thursday 15 August, 6.15 pm for 7.00 pm

LOCATION: Kosciuszko Room, Thredbo Alpine Hotel, Thredbo, NSW

COST: \$75.00 – includes 3-course meal and complimentary drink on arrival

DINNER BOOKINGS REQUIRED with payment by cheque, Credit Card or Direct Deposit

RSVP by Sunday 11 August to: Marion Murri Ph. 02 6457 6806 or email mmtvl@bigpond.com

For more information contact THS President Alan Fredericks on 02 9449 7610, mobile 0417 401 403 or alanf@bigpond.net.au