

PERISHER HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Issue 6 Winter 2011

Kiandra: Where Australian Skiing Began

In April this year the partly restored Kiandra Courthouse played host to a special gathering and a new exhibition to celebrate 150 years of skiing in Australia.

Kiandra is a place of Australian skiing 'firsts': it's where Australian skiing started and where Australia's first ski club, the Kiandra Snow Shoe Club, was formed. Kiandra residents helped Charles Kerry make the first winter ascent of Mt Kosciuszko and they assisted with the first snow-based search and rescue in Australia in August 1920. In 1954 Peter Fountain installed Australia's first T-bar ski lift on Kiandra's Township Hill. Kiandra also produced some of Australia's earliest ski champions, such as Bill Paterick.

During the celebrations, some local stalwarts, including Colin Myers (co-founder of Selwyn Snowfields) and Neville Locker (Kiandra historian), were captured on video talking about the significance of the area and its contribution to the development of Australian skiing. Two hotlinks to the video are provided below.

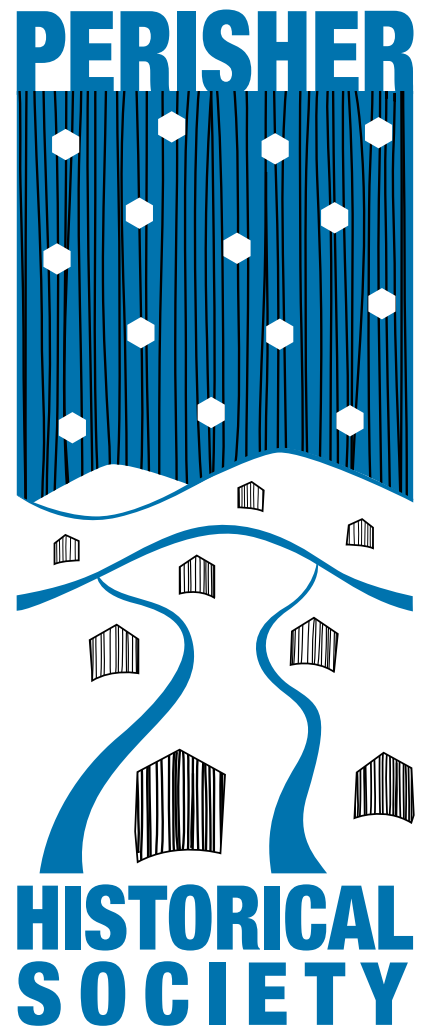
Vimeo: <http://vimeo.com/23792694>

Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vY9RQniLd8>

Thanks to Jennifer Hewitson (Historic Heritage Coordinator, NPWS) for information used in the display.



A Kiandra Snow Carnival in the early 1900s (original image by Charles Kerry).



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President's Note

The Society has been very fortunate to have the committed involvement of both NPWS and Perisher Blue. Our Rules provide for both organisations to have ex-officio representation on the committee and in retrospect this has proved to be a masterstroke. From the beginning, the NPWS committee position has been filled by Dave Woods. Dave is taking extended Long Service leave at the end of July and I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge his marvellous personal contribution.

Dave in his NPWS role as Resorts Environmental Liaison Officer has been a tireless supporter of the Society and nothing exemplifies this more than his efforts with the Newsletter. His contribution has been pivotal in the establishment and ongoing success of the PHS and, on behalf of the PHS committee and membership, I wish to thank him sincerely for his positive contributions and all that he has done for us. It has been a pleasure to work with Dave and certainly educational. I look forward to welcoming him back when he and his family return from their travels and adventures.

NPWS are in the process of searching for a replacement to carry out Dave's role and in due course we look forward to welcoming this lucky person to the PHS Committee.

Philip Woodman

150 Years of Skiing – Celebration and Significance

By Dave Woods

Historical milestones and anniversaries are important to a lot of people; they give reason and opportunity to celebrate, reflect and promote significant events in our lives. Such milestones also reinforce our identity as individuals and community, giving value to what we do in the present and often provide direction for the future.

Although traditional owners have an extraordinarily long connection to this country, Australia as a nation is young and our recorded history can only date back a little over 200 years. So to learn that in Australia's short history the activity of skiing was first witnessed at Kiandra during the gold rush of 1860/61 and developed by the remaining populace in the following years is quite remarkable. Yes, certainly by the 1860s regional towns were established, many tracks were consolidated into roads and railway expansion was underway. But for most of this vast continent the country still remained unmapped, transport still relied heavily upon ships plying coastal waters and bushrangers roamed many of the major thoroughfares.

Paradoxically, the gold that provided government revenue from royalties, levies and permits, also stifled progress in agriculture and some manufacturing industries. The progress and development of the colonies was being interrupted by the loss of much valued labour and investment into short-lived gold rushes. Rushes also put pressure on ports and towns as boatloads of immigrants from Europe, South Africa, North America

and China moved quickly to the location of the latest boom. The Kiandra Goldfields have a similar history to other rushes in Australia throughout the 1850s, with perhaps one major exception – snow! Boom life in places like Ballarat, Bendigo, Hill End and Lambing Flat was certainly uncomfortable during the winter months, but the Kiandra rush of 1859-60 lured man and pick to the Snowy Mountains to try their luck in an environment that was so different from the rest of Australia.

No precise census was ever gathered, but up to 10,000 people were believed to be present around Kiandra during the summer of 1859-60. This figure dwindled to a respectable 3,000 by September 1860. Either way, a lot of people travelled to Kiandra only to experience a snowbound winter that limited panning (and some sluicing) opportunities and created harsh living conditions. But this difficult snow-laden environment, also gave rise to 'snow shoeing' – the term commonly used to describe skiing until the 1920s.

There is evidence that skis were introduced to the Kiandra goldfields by Norwegian miners, and reports in local newspapers in 1861 describe young people "climbing the lofty summits with snow shoes and then sliding down with a volancy that would do credit to some of our railway trains." It is plausible that skiing took place during the winter of 1860 but the evidence to date is equivocal. Nevertheless 'snow shoeing' became a recreational activity enjoyed by the mining community and the

value of skis for transport was also appreciated as it made moving across the snow much easier. Once the appetite for skiing was entrenched in the Kiandra community, miners prepared for their snowseason by manufacturing 'snow shoes' from alpine ash trees; a straight grained timber growing on nearby slopes.

Such was the popularity of snow shoeing amongst the remnant Kiandra population that the Kiandra Snow Shoe Club was eventually formed (some time before the winter of 1882, but perhaps not as early as 1861 as proposed by some). However we do know that early club members were miners, tradesmen and town business folk, who in time, fostered the making of skis and organised races. In subsequent years, as the popularity of snow shoeing grew, so did the interest in the sport from those not associated with Kiandra mining. Fortunately for us, Charles Kerry, an official photographer to the Governor of NSW and keen skier, captured many enduring images of skiing and life around Kiandra, particularly from 1895 to 1905. Kerry's timing was perfect as his images were taken just as interest in snow recreation started to drift south towards the mountains and valleys centred along the Main Range.

By the early 1900s, the NSW Government's investment in tourism, with the construction of the Summit Road to Mt Kosciusko and the Hotel Kosciusko at Diggers Creek, was a catalyst for directing people away from Kiandra, although a remnant population would maintain some connection with skiing in the area until the early 1970s. However, resort development that accompanied

the construction of the Snowy Mountains Scheme in the 1950s would eventually transform the recreation of skiing into a snowsports industry. The villages of Charlotte Pass, Thredbo, Guthega, Perisher and Smiggins became synonymous with skiing in NSW and investment in club lodges, commercial hotels, retail shops, lifts and groomed ski slopes began to epitomise the evolution of what skiing was all about 100 years after it began as a recreational adjunct to life in a gold mining town.

Now it's 2011 and we reflect with fondness about how our recreation and industry started 150 years ago and, in one way or another, helped shape so many PHS members' lives: the camaraderie of club lodges; the participation in competitions; the opportunities for post-war migrants; the inspiration of our Olympic athletes; the trials and tribulations of building and running a lodge; the challenges of early transport; the snowmakers, the groomers and the patrollers who patch us up. These are just some of the elements that give us joy and identity with this particular milestone. And of course there are those picture-perfect winter days that follow a night's blizzard, leaving a faultless snow cover that allows the most graceful of glides and turns to create the most blessed of memories.

Whatever pleasure or business you get from this significant milestone, reflect with affection about how it was all started 150 years ago by those hardy goldminers and their kin in and around Kiandra. The legacy of those snowbound pioneers has contributed much to the social and geographical fabric that characterises the Snowy Mountains today.



Yesteryear's cross-country skiing with one long pole contrasts with how we ski today with a pair of stocks (original image by Charles Kerry).



The original technique for downhill skiing (original image by Charles Kerry).



Father and son skiing in Kiandra (original image by Charles Kerry).



The utility value of skis – the Kiandra mail run (original image by Charles Kerry).

Kiandra Courthouse a Winner

All of the hard work that has gone into stage one of restoring the Kiandra Courthouse and Kiandra Chalet was recognised when the project won the National Trust Adaptive Reuse (under \$1 million) category in early April. Kurt Price (Project Manager from lead contractor Stokes Rousseau), Caroline Lawrance (Project Officer from DECCW Cultural Heritage Division) and Mick Petit (NPWS Area Manager) were present to collect the trophy and certificate.

The last issue of the PHS Newsletter (Issue 5 Summer 2010/11) included a wonderful summary by Jennifer Hewitson of the history and restoration work being undertaken on the Kiandra Courthouse. The next stages are currently being planned and it's now worth reflecting on the outstanding work and recognition that have been achieved so far. The PHS congratulates all who have been involved in bringing a Kiandra icon back to life.



From left to right: Kurt Price (Project Manager from lead contractor Stokes Rousseau), Caroline Lawrance (Project Officer from DECCW Cultural Heritage Division) and Mick Petit (NPWS Area Manager).

World History of Skiing

If you are interested in the historical chronology of world skiing, log on to the following website for a convenient event timeline. The site is sponsored by the International Ski Federation and encourages contributions. The timeline includes an interesting list of events, developments, locations and dates spanning over 8,000 years (6,300 BC to present). Not surprisingly, the gaps between timeline dates increase the further you delve back in history, but the information is fascinating and the site well worth a look.

<http://history.fis-ski.com/>

50 Years of Eiger Chalet 1961 – 2011

On Saturday 25 June, a “Night of Reminiscing” was held to celebrate Eiger Chalet’s 50th birthday. Old friends and locals got together to mark this special milestone in Perisher’s history. Uwe and Gil Boehm were special guests for the evening where copies of Gil’s book, ‘Eiger Chalet Fifty Years 1961 – 2011’, were available for purchase.

The following history was extracted from the 2011 Eiger Chalet brochure.

In 1961, a then 25 year old Gunter (Garry) Fischer, having left post-war Europe behind, heard that the National Parks and Wildlife Service was planning to grant leases in the ‘new frontier’

of Perisher Valley. Gunter packed his swag in far North Queensland and headed south.

Some early development had taken place at Sponar’s Inn (then called Hotel Australia); at Smiggin Holes where a ski tow had been installed and at Charlotte Pass which was an overnight destination for ‘ski tourers’, now called cross-country skiers.

With not much more than a positive attitude and some great ideas, Gunter convinced the National Parks and Wildlife Service to enter into a lease with him for a prime site in Perisher Valley.

Mr Ken Murray of K.G. Murray publishing (the publishers at that time of a number of successful magazines) also secured a site but preferred the site secured by Gunter Fischer. The two men discussed the issue and agreement was reached over a beer and a handshake, that they would swap sites. That “beer and handshake” deal was later ratified by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and that same year Gunter Fischer commenced construction of the Eiger Chalet on the site where it stands today.

Ken Murray’s is the site upon which the Man from Snowy River Hotel now stands. Gunter Fischer is still one of the owners of Eiger Chalet and his daughter Liane and son-in-law Simon are the Eiger’s Managers.

One of the reminiscences included in Gil’s book comes from Michael Fischer, Garry’s eldest son.

I think we might have been on the cutting edge of becoming

young vandals in Perisher Valley in the '60s when, with a devious turn of mind we decided that it would be a great idea to sabotage the Number 3 T Bar (now replaced by the Village 8 chairlift). We walked up the hill after school late one winter afternoon and carefully pulled down one 'T' each from

the cable going up and down and tied them together! The expectation was that when the lift was started in the morning the whole thing would pull itself into very gratifying wreckage. It was not to be. We were seen by Paul Duggan, the lift supervisor, who bolted up the hill on his skidoo to intercept us. We

tried to outrun him on our weird timber toboggan bikes that we had at the time, but flight was no use, as the skidoo was faster and Paul was as mad as a tiger snake. He put the fear of death into us and we never interfered with his lifts again, not often anyway.



The original Eiger Chalet in 1964 (photo courtesy of Gil Boehm).



Left to right: Liane, Peter and Michael Fischer 1965 (photo courtesy of Gil Boehm).



Marjorie and Garry Fischer with their three children (photo courtesy of Gil Boehm).

Mt Perisher Double Chair Turns 50

By Dave Woods

This year marks the 50th anniversary of one of Perisher's lifting stalwarts – the Mt Perisher Double Chair (originally known as the Mt Perisher Chairlift). There are not too many 50 year old aerial cableways in service today and plans are afoot to replace it with a modern detachable version. Yet this icon has served four generations of skiers and was an integral part of the early development and vision for a burgeoning Perisher Valley.

In 1955, Perisher Valley's first mechanised tow was erected at North Perisher - the North Perisher Tow. This and subsequent rope-tows, including the Village Rope Tow,

served the valley's patrons well as interest in snowsports began to develop. Then in 1959 K G Murray Publishing Company financed the first T-bars which were built on 'Front Valley'. Ken Murray was also responsible for the building of the Sundeck Hotel (1959) and The Man from Snowy River Hotel (1960); his enthusiasm and commitment to see the full potential of Perisher Valley develop as a ski resort were boundless. Therefore it should be no surprise to learn that Ken Murray was also responsible for the development of the first chairlift in the valley – the Mt Perisher Chairlift.

Spurred on by the appetite for longer runs and the growing demand and interest to open up new skiing areas on the Perisher

Range, the logical progression from rope tows and T-bars was to construct a chairlift. After all, these aerial cableways were being rolled out in post-war Europe and North America, as well as in Falls Creek (1957) and Thredbo (1958). The advantage of chairlifts over rope tows and T-bars was the increase in lift capacity and the valuable recovery time for skiers between runs, particularly over long distances, as no energy was expended going up the hill (except perhaps in keeping warm during adverse weather).

So in the winter of 1960 potential ski areas in the lee of Mt Perisher and Back Perisher Mountain were surveyed to identify degree of skiing difficulty and snow depth – both at

the top and bottom of both mountains. Mt Perisher got the 'thumbs-up' and Transfield P/L was awarded the contract to fabricate and construct the chairlift. Plans and specifications for the chairlift were purchased from Gerhard Mueller of Zurich, Switzerland (who founded the company GMD Mueller Lifts, a major competitor to the other lift giants Dopplemayr of Austria and Garaventa also of Switzerland)*. Mueller also provided the chair's double-grips and a few other pulley pieces. The bottom station and restaurant were built by Tumut contractor S.F. Davey.

By the end of December 1960, the chairlift line was pegged-out in readiness for the start of construction in January 1961. The lack of an access road to the construction site resulted in a flying-fox being built to cart materials from the Kosciusko Road to the base station (the proposed access road to the chairlift base was denied by the Kosciusko State Park Trust's Superintendent, Neville Gare, who was enforcing a new off-road driving regulation). The tower stanchions were prefabricated and assembled on site after being carted up the hill by hand and by additional flying-foxes positioned up the lift line.

The following excerpt from John Davis's memoirs titled 'A History of the Early Development of Perisher-Smiggin's' describes the construction of the Mt Perisher Double Chairlift.

Transfield was principally a builder of high tension power lines and the comparatively

new company was formed by a couple of Italian immigrants with a large part of their workforce being fellow countrymen. In addition to Transfield's experience in the construction of electrical transmission towers across the country, they were possibly the most experienced chairlift builders, having built the original Thredbo chair a year earlier. So twenty odd non-English speaking Italians led by broken English speaking Joe (I think) their foreman, knew exactly what they were about on arriving in Perisher in January 1961. A flying-fox was built from the main road to the bottom station location to get materials and gear on site, other flying foxes were used up the lift line, all the time the workers were running up the slope carrying all sorts of loads, running not walking. The Perisher locals were transfixed by their fitness and progress and many hours were spent watching these wizards at work and when it came to tower erection their trapeze antics rivalled Wirth's Circus. The chairlift was finished on time and I don't remember if a helicopter was used at all in its construction, but feel it may have been in the latter stages as one was in the area, being used in the building of the first T-bar at Smiggins; but as far as the Valley locals of that era are concerned the first chairlift in Perisher Valley was built by a bunch of crazy Italians using their bare hands.

Like all pre-season developments, there was a concerted race against the early season snowfalls, interspersed

with the usual mountain weather of torrential downpours and gale force winds. But the contractors held their resolve and schedule, completing the 'mile long chairlift' in time for the start of the 1961 season. Lift operations commenced on 9 June and by written and oral accounts, the chairlift worked well and the licenced restaurant was very popular. It was also reported that the Governor-General of Australia at the time, 1st Viscount de L'Isle (William Sidney), took a ride on the chairlift during a visit to Perisher Valley in September that year.

Now 50 years later the stalwart of lift operations in Perisher Valley has reached a milestone not many cableways manage to achieve. And although its operation is not far from being wound up, its service to Perisher Valley has certainly made a significant contribution to the skiing experience and an improvement in lift capacity, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s. To the Mt. Perisher Double Chairlift – Happy Birthday from the PHS!

*Gerhard Mueller was credited with the invention of the modern detachable chairlift in the late 1940s. Upon his death in 1985 his company was bought by its management team, but subsequently folded in 1992. In 2002, Dopplemayr and Garaventa merged to become the Dopplemayr Garaventa Group, with subsidiaries and divisions scattered around the world.



Perisher identity and ski instructor, Jean Ecuyer, rides with company on the Mt Perisher Chairlift to promote skiing in Kosciusko State Park (image courtesy of John Davis).



The bottom station and restaurant of the Mt Perisher Chairlift operating for the 1963 snowseason (photo used with permission of the National Archives of Australia).



A view of the slopes from the restaurant at the bottom station of the Mt Perisher Chairlift in 1965 (photo used with permission of the National Archives of Australia).



A 1962 view of Mt Perisher along the chairlift line (photo used with permission of the National Archives of Australia).



The Mt Perisher Chairlift in its first year of operation in 1961. One PHS member remembers the incessant Tyrolean music played through the speakers to 'delight' skiers riding the chair (photo used with permission of the National Archives of Australia).



Mid-station on the Mt Perisher Chairlift (photo courtesy of the Perisher Resort).

Vale – Col Ferris

By Terry Chalk

Col Ferris was the last of the 'original' volunteer Ski Patrollers still actively patrolling in Perisher Valley. Sadly, he passed away in Sydney on 13 November 2010, aged 70.

Since the 1960s, Col had made his annual pilgrimage to Perisher, wearing the red and white jacket and helping skiers who found themselves in difficulty on the hill. He was very well known, with many friends both in the Snowy Mountains and in Sydney where he lived. The funeral chapel at Macquarie Park was filled to overflowing with the many people who literally came from the mountains to the sea to pay their respects to this very remarkable man.

Col became a good skier during his time in Austria as a young man. On his return to Australia he became involved in ski patrolling in Perisher through his long-time surf club friend Grant Turnbull. In those days you were given a red

armband by Grant and waited for a siren to sound, signifying an accident somewhere out there; a far cry from today's radio communications, snowmobiles and ambulance transport.

His involvement in the mountains didn't just stop at ski patrolling. For many years Col was a Director of Oldina Ski Club, enthusiastically taking on the role of 'Chief Electrician' on the many work parties that took place during the 1970s and 1980s.

Despite changes to modern ski equipment and techniques, Col remained the classical, elegant, Austrian-style skier. You didn't have to see the face, just the style and the ski patrol jacket, to know it was Col coming down the hill. With his many years of experience both here and overseas, when there was drama on the hill and you had to get someone down, Col was the man you wanted by your side.

An avid surfer, skier, golfer, collector of beer labels and generally likeable larrikin, Col liked nothing better than a cold ale at

the end of a hard day's activity. He skied all around the world and even at the time of his death was planning his next trip to Japan.

He will be sadly missed by his wife Anne, daughter Sue and all his friends at Perisher.



Col Ferris – (photo courtesy of Sue Ferris).



Col Ferris perfecting a turn while on ski patrol duties in 1974 (photo courtesy of Sue Ferris).

4th PHS Annual Dinner at the Kosciuszko Chalet Hotel

What a delight to be at the Kosciuszko Chalet Hotel in Charlotte Pass Ski Resort for the 4th PHS Annual Dinner on Saturday 11 June. 'The grand old lady of the mountains' was an ideal venue for celebrating 150 years of skiing in Australia, given its pivotal role in the development of snowsports in Australia.

The evening was a wonderful success thanks to host Kevin Blyton, Charlotte Pass Resort owner, and his committed staff, who overcame all the logistical challenges of gearing up the restaurant and transporting

guests before the official season opening.

Exquisite food, outstanding hospitality and lots of reminiscences were a recipe for a wonderful night, much enjoyed by the 85 people who attended. To add to the sense of history in Arches Restaurant itself, the menu card was a facsimile of the one presented on 25 December 1951, though the food on the night was rather more 'fine dining' than that served 60 years ago.

This year a panel of personalities associated with the Chalet or Charlotte Pass Village shared

their memories with the guests. Rick Walkom (former Chalet Manager), Deidre Shannon (former house keeper at The Chalet), Tommy Tomasi (ski instructor, ski patroller and jack of all trades), Larry Adler (ski instructor), Peter Southwell-Keely (KAC author and historian) and Randy Wieman (ski instructor and photographer) each spoke for about 10-15 minutes before questions from the audience. The proceedings were compared by former Perisher CEO, Ashley Blondel. There were some very humorous anecdotes about the

challenges of working and skiing in those early years, but also some sad stories. Nevertheless, everyone came away from the evening full of wonderful stories, knowing that those who had experienced life in Charlotte Pass

Village had been enriched with good memories and life-long friendships.

The PHS would again like to thank Kevin Blyton for offering the Chalet for the dinner, Rachel Maclean (Hotel Manager) who

also worked tirelessly as maitre de on the night, Lachlan Maclean (Resort Manager) who arranged transport and of course the chefs and wait staff whose sterling efforts helped make the night a most memorable one.



The Kosciuszko Chalet Hotel, also known as the 'grand old lady of the mountains' was the venue for the 4th Perisher Historical Society Annual Dinner (photo by Dave Woods).



Judy Thomson (PHS) and Andrew Harrigan (NPWS) having a pre-dinner drink (photo by Dave Woods).



Relaxing before dinner were Deidre Shannon, Garry Abbottsmith, Faye Pendergast and Phyl Abbottsmith (photo by Philip Woodman).



Reminiscing before settling down to some fine dining (photo by Dave Woods).



Guests enjoying the atmosphere in historic Arches Restaurant (photo by Dave Woods).



Ashley Blondel (standing right) introduces the guest panel at the Perisher Historical Society dinner. Sitting left to right: Rick Walkom, Deidre Shannon, Tommy Tomasi, Larry Adler, Peter Southwell-Keely and Randy Wieman (photo by Philip Woodman).

From an Office Girl at the Chalet in the 1950s

By Adrienne Smith

No matter what your job was, if you hoped to last working through the winter at the Chalet in the 1950s, it was sheer necessity to be a team player, happy to pitch in and work your butt off whenever it was needed – and that seemed to be most of the time. A sense of humour was a huge plus as well.

It was a small staff, more like a big family, with no communication to the outside world apart from the radio in the manager's office where contact calls were transmitted out twice a day to the old Hotel site, Smiggins, Betts Camp and Kunama Hutte. The days of mobile phones, emails and faxes were light years away.

On my first year I was delivered to the old Hotel site in May by my Mum and picked up by Vince Coles in the big red Leyland truck - an inexperienced 22 year old and the first time I'd lived away from home. While I made myself known to that wonderful mountain character, Mrs Mac the postmistress, Mum had a quiet word to Vince. What she said I never knew but from then on tough guys like Vince, Ray Hookham and Frank Patterson treated me like a kid sister and were kindness itself till I found my feet in this strange new world.

Yvonne and Helen staffed the office with me and Jenny Lippman ran the adjacent shop. May was too early for skiing but it wasn't too early for Jenny and me to skate on Spencers Creek. Cees Koeman, later of Kasse's Lodge in Thredbo, would strap

his Dutch skating blades over his boots and lead us on the long bumpy runs down the creek bed with little Peter McGuinn tagging behind.

We four girls shared a dormitory and at the same time the snow arrived so did our fifth roommate, the beautiful Czech ex-Olympian ski instructor Sasha Nekvapil. And she is still the beautiful Sasha – at 92 she stays a wonderful skier, and looks a million dollars with the trim figure of a young woman. Sasha's arrival would stir up extra excitement among the female staff when she would open up a huge suitcase full of wonderful gear from Melbourne that she'd brought with her to sell. This was a forerunner to what eventually became 'Sasha's' - one of the most glamorous boutiques in Thredbo Village years later.

The Chalet season was now officially on and guests began to pour in. We would no sooner get through one change-over weekend when the next one seemed to be on us. If the weather was really bad none of us got any sleep – waiting for those snowmobiles to come in with new guests and then turn around to take the old ones back. It could go on all day and through the night. You could count on at least one of the beaten up vehicles to throw a track or get bogged down and that would hold everyone up. Guests helped with digging them out using any shovels or equipment that might be available. For the guests I guess it was all part of the crazy experience. The drivers, on the

other hand, were exhausted wrecks when it was over.

An extra job for the office girls was to take turns in serving staff each night from a window at the side of the bar. The queue always seemed to be led by a fierce little character dressed in a white overall demanding her fifth of Chateau Tanunda brandy, a packet of cigars and her pipe tobacco. This was Mamie the laundress and if you didn't have what she wanted there would be no excuses accepted and terrifying repercussions. She ran a tight ship down in the basement where no one was allowed into her kingdom except her helper Englishman John Cotton. If you did manage to get a look in, it was an amazing blast. The machinery at a mighty roar and John's music system going at full volume so it could be heard over it all. John was a loveable character who every month was packed off in a snowmobile to collect registered mail from home in England. An old fashioned remittance man? None of us ever found out. How he put up with Mamie none of us ever knew.

How did we spend our spare time? Skiing for a start of course – it was total luxury to me to have a rope tow up the Pulpit Rock run when my only past experience was the YMCA ski lodge above Guthega Dam where you climbed the mountain and someone read instructions out of a book on how to ski down with some sort of control. The staff would run a mid week dance in the dining room for guests as well, with the staff band providing the music. I

can't remember too much about the band only that it was pretty bad. The staff held ski races for the guests at the end of the week and there were unending parties before and after lights out. The staff's own special private parties were held in the Blue Room at the back of the Chalet and these were very much invitation only to lucky guests.

Sometime during the season the Spencers Creek hydrographers would hold an open house at the weather station for the Chalet staff. The station walls were covered with superb photographs taken all over the Main Range by these hard working men who led such an isolated existence. These were great nights with very uncertain return trips.

It was another world to spend the winter of 1956 looking deep into a huge snow drift that covered the office windows all season and to have massive icicles hanging over our dormitory windows. Skiing off the roof that year wasn't officially allowed but certainly happened. First thing in the morning it was a walk up Mt Stilwell to watch the sunrise when the snow-covered Main Range would turn a rosy pink. And maybe the most beautiful and awe inspiring experience was to climb Mt Northcote in full moon and finally a wonderful schuss to the bottom on the crystallised powder. We had no langlauf skis – just your normal 195s with the cables released on the bindings, hopefully to make the climb a bit easier.

But with all this beauty, fun and hard work, it seemed tragedy

had to strike. On a mid-season morning I walked into the office on early shift to hear Stan McGuinn taking a radio message from the tow hut near Kunama Hutte that an avalanche had destroyed the lodge completely. Worst of all, young Roslyn Wesche had been killed. The horrifying news of her death had to be kept quiet until someone from the site could report back in person. Clothes and equipment were gathered up from staff and guests and a rescue party was quickly on its way. Hours later, an exhausted Ken Breakspear and Adrian Studley arrived from Kunama and Stan then could carry out the heart breaking job of telling Roslyn's parents and two aunts who were staying in-house with the Ski Club of Australia. Finally a sled appeared through the drifting snow at the top of Charlotte's Pass and Roslyn was transferred into a snowmobile for her final trip home.

The experience of being part of the Chalet team in the early years was one that none of us would ever regret. There are so many friendships that have remained. Through the years, we've run into each other on the mountains, as part of the ski industry, at celebrations, dinners, reunions and ski shows. Somehow, when this happens, the years just slip away and the memories are as fresh and strong as ever. We are the lucky ones.

Adrienne has had a significant involvement with sport and recreation in Australia and with skiing in particular. She was Executive Director of the NSW Ski Association and the Australian Ski Federation, National Coordinator Sport & Recreation for the Australian Bicentennial Authority, Chairman FIS Recreational Ski Committee and her role as President of Disabled Winter Sports Australia was recognised with an OAM.



Adrienne Smith (nee Funda), Staff Member 1953, The Chalet, Charlottes Pass

Recovery of Johnnie Abbottsmith's First Snow Cruiser

Recently, some smart detective work by Garry Abbottsmith has led to the discovery of the first Snow Cruiser imported by his father in the late 1960s. It seems the beautiful blue machine had been stored in a sheep shed on Brindabella Station for 30 years.

Although Johnnie Abbottsmith and his family left Smiggin Holes in 1959 to establish The Snowline Caravan Park at the Creel (relocating a few years later to the junction of the Kosciuszko Road and Alpine Way when the Snowy River was flooded to become Lake Jindabyne), Johnnie maintained his connection with the resorts and snow by becoming an agent for Evinrude Snow Cruisers. According to John Davis he was also one of the first to introduce two seat oversnow vehicles to the mountains (frequently referred to as skidoos), and he performed a feat that would have incurred the wrath of the Kosciusko State Park administrators (had they found out) by travelling on skidoo between Kiandra and Thredbo in 1965.

The link to Garry's amazing find in that sheep shed is that Brindabella Station was once owned by John Dowling, former part owner of Chalet Chez Jean in Perisher Valley (unfortunately burnt down in 1971). Since collecting the Snow Cruiser, Garry has procured a few extra parts and hopes to restore the machine to its former glory.

The PHS wishes Garry well with his project and looks forward to a picture of the finished Snow Cruiser.



The Snow Cruiser the day it was retrieved from Brindabella Station (photo by Garry Abbottsmith).



Garry and his mum Phyl reunited with a Snow Cruiser that Johnnie Abbottsmith imported into Australia over 40 years ago (photo courtesy of the Abbottsmith collection).



A Johnnie Abbottsmith imported Snow Cruiser as it appeared in The Australian Woman's Weekly on page 8, 24 July 1968; possibly the same one retrieved by Garry Abbottsmith from Brindabella Station after 30 years in a sheep shed.

Ross Martin

As we go to press the skiing community is stunned and saddened to learn of the tragic death of Ross after a cycling accident. An Olympian (1968) and stalwart of the XC skiing community he will be sadly missed by his friends around the world. PHS extends its condolences to the Martin family.

Revamp to Display Cabinet

The next time you happen to be passing by the PHS Display Cabinet in the Skitube building, stop and have a look at our poster celebrating 150 Years of Skiing in Australia and the history of the Mt Perisher Chairlift. The poster provides an opportunity to inform locals and visitors about how snowsports began in Australia, complemented by those wonderful black and white images taken by Charles Kerry over 100 years ago.

The poster has also been reprinted in the Snowy Times – a major tourism publication for the Snowy Mountains Region.



The revamped display cabinet for the 2011 snowseason (photo by Dave Woods).

New Members

The PHS extends a warm welcome to the following new members who have joined since the last newsletter was published in Summer 2010/11.

Myrna Burke*
Graham French*
Ian Griffith
Liz Hay
Margaret McLean
Bert Potter
David Roxburgh
Brindabella Ski Club (Guthega)
NSW Snowsports Association
Yaraandoo Ski Club

*5 year membership