

# PERISHER HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Issue 3 December 2009

## A Note from the President

Membership has risen to 52 clubs, families and individuals and their support is very much appreciated. The committee has decided to make 31 December the membership anniversary, with new members' renewals to be the end of the year following their joining date.

The Lodge History Project is underway. All club lodges have been sent a questionnaire and asked to nominate a contact person. We have also encouraged clubs to get in touch with either myself or Donald Johnston, the Project Leader. We hope that the project will help to raise awareness of PHS and its role as a central point for capturing past events and memorabilia of the area.

Over the winter season, the committee continued to spread the word by attending a number of 'historical' events, including dinners to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Sundeck Hotel and the centenary of the original Hotel Kosciusko. We also caught up with old friends at the Thredbo Historical Society's very successful 'Mid Winter Dinner' and extended our congratulations to their new President, Alan Fredericks.

In addition, Pam and I were delighted to take part in the celebrations in Thredbo in November to recognise the extraordinary work and

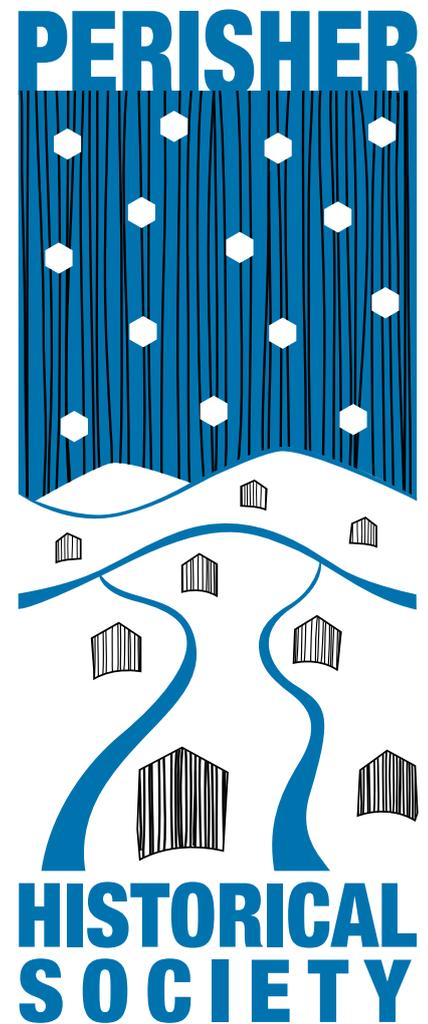
achievements of Ron Finneran in providing access to skiing for the disabled and a heap of other things besides.

Thanks to Pam for arranging a very successful winter get-together for PHS supporters on Tuesday 14 August. We called it "Hello in the Snow" and the Perisher Valley Hotel kindly allowed us to take over their fireplace alcove for a couple of very convivial hours.

A site has been earmarked for the display case in the Perisher Skitube Terminal. This is to be on the wall immediately behind the trolley rack and construction is planned for the summer. The challenge now is to plan the initial display. Naturally we are keen to receive and preserve any items from the past and especially memories – I would be delighted to take your call at anytime and have a chat – just ring or e-mail.

Another project next year is helping to re-invigorate participation in the Perisher Cup – this is your early warning – start planning now. We have now located all the results. Speaking of which – I have met with NSW SnowSports and, wonder of wonders, all the Minute Books have been preserved and have been passed to PHS – what a marvellous treasure trove this should be for researchers.

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Many thanks to Dave Woods for all his work in compiling and producing our Newsletters.

I look forward to seeing you all at

the PHS Annual General Meeting on 6 February 2010 and the Annual Dinner on 12 June 2010.

*Philip Woodman*

## Shifty's Run

(adapted from the Perisher website)

This year Grant Turnbull, known to many as 'Shifty', notched up 50 consecutive winter seasons in the Snowy Mountains. In recognition of his committed service to ski patrolling and ski instruction at Perisher, 'Shifty's Run' has been named in his honour.

Grant commenced skiing in 1959 at Charlotte Pass where he stoked the boilers at The Chalet, before becoming Perisher's first professional ski patroller. In 1970 he began work as a ski instructor and today, at the age of 80, he's still at it. Unlike many who return to warmer climes in the off-season, Grant has pursued at least 30 back-to-back winter seasons by instructing at the Soll Ski Resort in Austria.

Originally a Bondi surfer, Grant decided to try skiing and has never looked back in the snowsports industry that he helped to shape. A love of

meeting and communicating with people and a sincere interest in fostering one's best abilities in learning to ski, makes Grant a deserving recipient of this honour.

'Shifty's Run' was officially opened on Friday 28 August and is located skiers right off the top of Eyre T-bar on Mt. Perisher. As for the colourful nickname, 'Shifty', it has been suggested that it derives from his days as a ladies' man, a connotation that Grant adamantly denies!



*Grant 'Shifty' Turnbull at the opening of the run named in his honour (photo by Gary Grant).*



*Perisher staff and other members of the ski community were present to celebrate the opening of 'Shifty's Run' on Mt. Perisher (photo by Gary Grant).*

## Special Centenary Dinner at Hotel Kosciusko (Sponar's Chalet)

As the 2009 ski season drew to a close, we were invited to celebrate a very significant milestone in the history of Australian snowsports. In 1909 Hotel Kosciusko at Diggers Creek was officially opened for guest accommodation in the Snowy Mountains, with the aim of refocusing winter tourism opportunities away from Kiandra to a location closer to the higher mountains to the south. This move, along with some other key events such as the Snowy Mountains Scheme, was instrumental in the development of the resorts that we enjoy today in Thredbo, Charlotte Pass and the Perisher Range.

On Wednesday 16 September, Penny and Peter Abbott of Sponar's Chalet and 70 guests celebrated the centenary of the opening of Hotel Kosciusko. The present structure was built in 1926 and originally served as the staff quarters for the larger Hotel Kosciusko complex, the shell of this building being all that remained after the disastrous fire of 1951. Fortunately Tony and Elisabeth Sponar saw the potential in the fire damaged remnant, and after renovations and refurbishment, opened the doors to a newly renamed Sponar's Lakeside Inn in 1959 to continue the fine tradition of the former establishment. So the celebrations also marked the 50th birthday for Sponar's Lakeside Inn (now known as Sponar's Chalet).

During the evening a fine three-course meal was served to a background of historic videos. Memorabilia adorned the walls and was displayed in a side room. Many of the exhibits included material from the historic Lamble and Skinner collection of photographs, trophies and skis kindly provided by Chas Skinner – a former resident of Sponar’s Lakeside Inn and an avid collector of ski memorabilia for the past 30 years. Kosciusko Alpine Club historian, Peter Southwell-Keely, presented an historic overview of the Hotel Kosciusko and touched on some of its more famous patrons. Peter’s presentation was based on material collected for his new book, ‘Out on the Tops – The Centenary of the Kosciusko Alpine Club’ (see later). An eyewitness account of the fire that razed Hotel Kosciusko was read by Kosciuszko Huts Association member Margaret Roseby, and live music was provided by singer/pianist John Hill.

With the aid of some Jindabyne locals, Elizabeth Sponar attended the early part of the evening from her nursing home in Cooma, allowing many guests the opportunity to reminisce with this matriarch of Australian skiing.



*Elizabeth Sponar (left) with host Penny Abbott (photo by Tim Heuchan).*



*Peter Southwell-Keely (left) with former Olympic skier Bob Arnott. Peter gave a presentation about the early history of Kosciusko Hotel (photo by Tim Heuchan).*



*Dinner guests browse the ski memorabilia kindly provided by Chas Skinner (photo by Dave Woods).*

## **Sundeck Hotel – Perisher’s First Hotel and Australia’s Highest**

The 50th birthday of the Sundeck Hotel was celebrated in fine style with a dinner on Saturday 27 June hosted by owner/manager Cliff Wallis. The Sundeck Hotel was Perisher’s first hotel and was a pioneer for commercial accommodation in an area dominated by an increasing number of club lodges. It also

gave club members from around the valley a place to socialise. Past guests, employees and club members who have patronised the hotel over the years shared their experiences (and party stories) during the special night.

The Sundeck Hotel opened for business in May 1959 and was the first hotel in Perisher Valley. Conceived, financed and built by Ken Murray of K.G. Murray P/L, the Sundeck Hotel originally contained 40 beds, bar and restaurant. Less than a year old, the hotel burnt down in January of the following year, but by July a new building had been constructed and opened in time for the core of the 1960 ski season (layers of planning bureaucracy would not expedite building projects as quickly today). Unlike the original bar roof that sloped north-south, the rebuilt Sundeck’s roof has an east-west aspect.

Interestingly, the fire that razed the Sundeck Hotel occurred only four weeks after the completion of the Man from Snowy River Hotel, which was (and still is) located on the other side of the valley and was also built by Ken Murray.

A couple of paragraphs describing the fire are reproduced from the ‘Australian Ski Year Book 1960’:

“The fire started in the kitchen, it is thought in the stove or chimney. The alarm was given at 2.am (morning of Saturday 30 January) by the persistent barking of Chilla, the hotel’s pet sheep dog.

“A fire engine, sent by the SMA from Island Bend, arrived 45 minutes after the fire had started,

but it could do little to stop the flames already raging through the building.”

Perched above the ‘front-valley’ ski slope, the Sundeck Hotel has an enviable location and is a truly ski-in – ski-out establishment. As Australia’s highest hotel at an elevation of 1769 metres, the Sundeck now has 90 beds and can still boast some of the best winter entertainment in the mountains.



*The Sundeck Hotel in 1959.*



*The remains of Sundeck Hotel after the fire of January 1960.*



*Sundeck employees from an earlier era.*

## Ron Finneran – A 35 year journey of success and achievement

In December 2009, Ron Finneran will retire as National Executive Director of Disabled WinterSport Australia (DWA) after 35 years of pioneering, encouraging and promoting winter sport for people with disabilities. Not only was Ron responsible for the introduction of disabled skiing into Australia, he has been the driving force behind the growth of the sport. No facilities or equipment were available to the disabled when Ron made his first visit to the snowfields in 1974. He was only able to sit on a rock in the sun and watch his able-bodied friends fly past on skis. From that day on, nothing has deterred him in his efforts to bring the joys of skiing to those with disabilities.

Together with Thredbo ski instructor Bruce Abel, Ron founded the Australian Disabled Skiers Federation (ADSF) in 1978, with the goal of making participation in winter sport available to all Australians with disabilities. Ron was elected as first President of the ADSF at the inaugural meeting in the Piano Bar in Thredbo and has served as National executive Director since 1984, making him the longest-serving professional administrator in disabled sport.

Ron, however, has been much more than an administrator; he is a proud Paralympian and a pioneer of the International Paralympic movement. As the only Australian at the first Winter Paralympic Games in Ornskoldsvik in Sweden in 1976, he won the hearts of the locals but was disappointed to be

disqualified from competition because he didn’t fit any of the existing categories; instead he was the forerunner for his events. Subsequently he was Chef de Mission of Australian Winter Paralympic Teams in 1984, 1988, 1992 and 1994.



*(Photo courtesy of Ron Finneran)*

Ron’s work in developing training programs, talent recognition and his personal support for budding skiers has been a major factor in Australia’s success in international competition; we are now ranked fifth in the world in alpine skiing for the disabled and DWA membership includes two current world champions.

Another achievement due largely to Ron’s vision and determination is Finsko’s Lodge at Jindabyne, which provides accommodation for people with disabilities, their families and friends in a specially-designed facility.

Through his charismatic personality and dogged determination, Ron has earned not only the thanks of disabled skiers but also the respect of government officials and strong support from the management of all ski resorts, their ski schools, the commercial ski industry and many sponsors and supporters.

This respect extends to the international ski officials with whom he has worked for years.

Ron's experience and enthusiasm were recognised in 1993 when he was elected President of the Australian Paralympic Federation and became Chairman of Sydney's successful bid for the 2000 Summer Paralympic Games.

In 2002, Ron was awarded the Australian Paralympic Medal and this honour was followed by the Order of Australia Medal in 2004. In 2005 he was inducted into the Sport Australia Hall of Fame. All these awards recognised not only his efforts to advance disabled skiing but his work across the whole spectrum of disabled sport to gain for our disabled athletes the benefits enjoyed by the able bodied.

Best wishes in your retirement Ron and good luck with the curling!

(Editor's note: Ron has been working hard to have curling included as the next winter Paralympic sport and it is rumoured that he is aiming to head up our curling team at the 2014 Winter Games.)

## Out on the Tops – The Centenary of the Kosciusko Alpine Club

The PHS would like to congratulate Kosciusko Alpine Club (KAC) member and historian, Peter Southwell-Keely, on the recent publication of his book 'Out on the Tops – The Centenary of the Kosciusko Alpine Club'. Peter first went skiing at the Chalet, Charlotte

Pass, in 1946 and has taken a keen interest in the development in the ski fields since then. He joined KAC as a Junior Member in 1952, has been actively involved in the Club's activities and was made a Life Member in 1995.

His book 'Out on the Tops' is a history of the first hundred years of the Kosciusko Alpine Club, the second oldest ski club in Australia after the Kiandra Pioneer Ski Club (1861). Since its inception KAC has been a major contributor to the development of skiing in Australia.

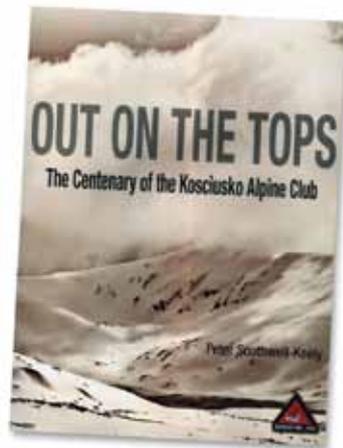
In A4 format with around 530 images spread across 320 pages, 'Out on the Tops' will not only be of interest to KAC members, but will also be a much valued library addition for Snowy Mountains history buffs and Australian snowsports devotees.

'Out on the Tops' can be purchased from:

Kosciusko Alpine Club  
P.O. Box 1822, Chatswood, NSW  
2057

Price: \$50 + \$10 postage.

For further details contact KAC administration on: (02) 9411 5974 or visit the KAC website at [www.kac.org.au/index.html](http://www.kac.org.au/index.html) to download an order form.



## Perisher Cup

### – The Phoenix Rising

The Perisher Cup was created and conducted by the NSW Ski Association the year after it was formed in the early 1950s. For the first thirty years Keith Line was the convenor followed by Bruce Vizard and now Anthony Evans of Cooma Ski Club. It has always been a social event that is also taken very seriously especially by the senior clubs. Until recently the event was held on the October Long Weekend, but due to unreliable snow it has been brought forward to the third weekend in September.

Perisher Historical Society is keen to assist Cooma Ski Club and Anthony Evans to raise the event back to its glory days and make the Perisher Cup weekend the competitive and social club event it really is.

I'm sure your club by-laws include the support of the sport, so here is your chance to involve your members.

The event consists of a Giant Slalom, Cross Country Relay and a Jump; Clubs enter teams of five persons, four competitors and a manager to assist in the running of the event.

**Cross Country 4x2km Relay** - all times to count.

**Giant Slalom** - best three times to count.

**Jump** - best three jumps (by three different competitors to count).

### Results of Perisher Cup 2009

#### Perisher Cup – Open event

1st The Man from Snowy River Hotel

2nd Cooma

3rd Canberra Alpine  
4th Yarrandoo

### **Perisher Bowl Women's Team**

1st East Perisher  
2nd Cooma  
3rd Canberra Alpine

### **Fastest Man on Mountain – GS**

Martin French - Yarrandoo

### **Fastest Women on Mountain – GS**

Emily Frain – Canberra Alpine

Hopefully next year there will be enough teams to resurrect a Second Division for the 'Perisher Plate' and the 'Perisher Pot' for the most improved team.

Clubs – start your managers!  
Managers – gather your competitors! More news will

follow, so in the meantime call Philip Woodman and register your commitment.

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## **Annual General Meeting**

The next AGM will be held on Saturday 6 February 2010 in the Conference Room at the NPWS Office in Jindabyne. All members are encouraged to attend.

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## **Next PHS Dinner**

Don't forget to reserve the evening of Saturday 12 June 2010 in your diary for the annual PHS Dinner. PHS members will receive early invitations.

## **New Members**

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

Cooma Ski Club  
Dianella Ski Club  
Technology Ski Club

Len Hibble  
Ian & Libby Anderson  
Keith & Maureen McCutcheon  
Peter & Dorothy Stitt

**Lyn Ingram & Stuart Macdermid**

***Bold indicates 5 year membership.***



*On behalf of the PHS Committee we wish all our members and those involved in snow sports a Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and safe travelling during the holiday period.*