

Burrumbeep and Snow – Memoir of a skiing tragic

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The following is not intended as an attempt at a detailed history of Burrumbeep – the history of the Club's beginnings has already been done by John Tulloch. Rather, it's just a personal memoir of my own journey in the world of skiing, and some memories of happenings and developments in the lodge and of the subsequent fun we've all had over the years. But it is all history!

History

But first, a bit of the history of the start of skiing in Victoria, as it involves my family. The genesis of organised recreational skiing was probably when a group of students (initially all male) from the University of Melbourne ventured up to Mt Buller in the late 1920s. One of them was my father Geoff Pern.

The mountain was presided over by a jovial Austrian named Helmut Koffler, who I think was involved in cutting timber on the mountain. He had a small building situated where one of the car parks is today. Access was not easy – the skiers drove to Klingsporn's farm, close to where the Timbertop school is today. Here they hired pack horses to carry their food and gear up the mountain. A large part of their mornings was spent climbing up to the saddle above the Bourke Street area. For climbing through soft snow the skiers used skins– strips of sealskin strapped to the soles of their skis. On the saddle there was a tin shed where Koffler's Hütte now stands, and here Koffler cooked a barbecue lunch for the skiers. The men skied up and down Bourke St, and it seems probable that that is when it was so named. Some (reportedly including my father and Rob Manifold, fortified by hipflasks of rum and cherry brandy) ascended to the summit and raced each other in a mad schuss back down to the saddle. With the arduous trek in and ski tows being just a dream for the future, these were fit skiers, and injuries were mercifully rare despite the unforgiving "rat trap" bindings. However a broken leg on one of these early expeditions led to a difficult evacuation of the patient which was described dramatically in the Melbourne newspapers.

The sport caught on, and happily by the mid-1930s the Junior Ski Club boasted many female members. Quite coincidentally one of these was Alice Stokes who was to become my mother a decade later. I recall her describing to me the conditions that they faced and the innocent fun they all had. By that time Koffler had expanded his accommodation, with separate dormitories for men and women. Hot water was in short supply, so the inmates were limited to one bath each in the week.

Meanwhile, some of the early skiers had tried Mt Hotham. The only accommodation then was at the Hotham Heights Hotel, which could be accessed by road in summer but in winter these intrepid souls had to trudge up the Bon Accord Spur to the Razorback. From Blowhard their route was around the south of the summit (held by many to have been a better line for the road when it was finally sealed, rather than

following the very exposed route we have today). Carrying all their gear and fresh food for a week was quite a feat.

They skied particularly in the Blue Ribbon area, where their university connection is evident in the names of runs such as Varsity Drag and The Noticeboard. An early rope tow was later installed there, and USC established their lodge nearby below the road.

Also coincidentally, Roz's mother Edith Cooke skied at Hotham in those early days. She had learnt to ski at finishing school in Switzerland.

In 1932 the Melbourne University skiers issued a challenge to their Sydney University counterparts, and the first Intervarsity ski competition was held at Mt Hotham. I have a framed photograph of the victorious Melbourne team, which included my father.

I suspect the snow seasons were often longer then than they are today. For a while an annual Boxing Day race was held on Australia Drift!

Falls Creek

The State Electricity Commission began work on the Kiewa hydroelectric scheme in the 1940s, giving access to the Falls Creek area. I had the privilege of skiing at Falls with my parents in my early teens, in the September school holidays for three successive years from 1958. Falls by then had become a thriving winter village of both private and commercial lodges. We rented Nelse for a week, sharing with family friends the Colquhouns from Melbourne and Betty Ross from Dunkeld with her children Catherine and Dion. Many years later Dion and I were independently to become foundation members of Burrumbeep. Several rope tows provided ski lifting at that time. Local identities Skippy and Tony ran a canteen and tow out of the one small building, with an early Ford V8 motor noisily powering the rope tow which ran a considerable distance up the Frying Pan. Tony charged ten shillings for a day ticket – a sum sadly out of the range of my pocket money. That ticket included the use of a nutcracker, essential equipment for using a long and steep rope tow. It consisted of a hinged hand-held clamp connected by a short cord to a broad canvas belt worn low across the buttocks. To catch the tow one would grab the moving tow rope with one hand, and once moving use the other hand to flick the nutcracker around the rope and hold it tight for the duration of the journey. Mac and Ian Colquhoun and I used the shorter Village tow, which did not really require a nutcracker - you just hung on with both hands. The only tricky part was negotiating the occasional pulleys which held the rope up – without getting your fingers pinched. The first chairlift at Falls Creek was installed in about 1960. It was a single chair!

Tasmania

I didn't do much skiing over the next decade: the odd weekend at Falls or Buller, an hilarious day at Threadbo and a total white-out at the aptly named Perisher. I lived in Tasmania for two years in the early 70s. What the mountains there lack in altitude they make up for with latitude, and I had my first white Christmas while walking the Overland Track. Skiing in Tassie was fun, with inexpensive rope tows run by the clubs at both Ben Lomond in the north and Mt Mawson in the south. The runs were not long and some quite narrow, which probably explains why Tasmanian skiers I have known all seem to be good skiers.

Burrumbeep beginnings

After moving back to Melbourne I was alerted by Richard Molesworth that moves were afoot to form a ski club. I leaped at the opportunity and joined the happy Burrumbeep band of hopefuls. I recall meetings at Burrumbeep homestead, with the Committee presiding on the Gubbins' verandah and the rest of us sprawled on the lawn below.

Construction finally began, and when I got to my first work party the trenches for the walls and footings had already been excavated, I gather with much blasting by the enthusiastic Roger Heard (rocks having appeared on nearby roofs). In one mammoth weekend we poured all the concrete slabs and footings. We couldn't afford to get a readymix truck up the mountain, so the whole job was done with barrows, shovels and a putt-putt cement mixer. It drizzled the entire weekend. After this the bricklayer did his thing, with a couple of members serving as brickie's labourers. Reportedly the gentleman had much complaint about the working conditions but he did manage to do a good job, as is evidenced today,

The Stawell Timber Industry men then arrived with the prefabricated building sections and started to put it all together. Arriving for another weekend of toil (I recall with Tim Lewis, Des Barr and others), we found the bedroom and bathroom section completed except for the roof, which we got in place by the end of the weekend. For accommodation Tim and I christened two of the bedrooms. The roofing job required some delicate balancing, and I have an unfortunate photo somewhere of Tim's foot protruding through one of the bedroom ceilings.

The next significant weekend I remember involved the installation of the boiler and heating system. I was asked to take up the panel heaters and convectors, so I pulled the back seats out of my Renault 16TS, and picked all the stuff up at the Burwood factory, stuffing the poor car to the gunnels. To give it its due there was only one spot on the road up where I heard the rear tyres scrape the top of the mudguards. Roger Heard allocated jobs and was a hard taskmaster. He had various people cutting lengths of copper pipe, flanging one end of these, drilling through the floor and attaching heaters to the walls. Meanwhile he crawled up under the floor (with a gopher dragging the oxy cylinders) and silver-soldered all the plumbing connections. The boiler was dragged in through the side door (today the door through to the flats),

installed in its corner and all the plumbing connected. A cistern for the heating water was installed in the roof above the kitchen/living area. And it all worked!

What is more amazing is that it is still working today, with only minor modifications including expanding it to heat the flats and lower lounge, and a compact gas boiler replacing the old oil-fired monster. Unfortunately there is a slow leak, probably hidden under one of those downstairs slabs. This requires topping up the water/antifreeze mix during the season, as air enters the system when the pressure falls. The antifreeze also contains a corrosion inhibitor which protects the steel heaters from rusting out.

Due to some unexplained skulduggery we had ended up with a site that was not the one originally allocated to us, and as it was then too late to change the plans we got a building with inappropriate orientation, having a verandah on the south side where no sunlight penetrated. With fridge space at a premium the verandah was often used to keep food and drink cold. Unfortunately currawong beaks are sharp, and milk cartons and plastic containers of prepared food were quickly penetrated by the voracious birds. They also pecked at the putty around the windows.

The opening

Finally, the building was finished. Beds were installed, but not much other furniture, and the floor was bare boards, except for some seagrass matting in the living area. We were the first club to achieve a complete build within one season, and a group of us christened the building on an hilarious Opening Weekend that year. I don't think we yet had an occupancy permit, but that didn't deter us. The season was opening, so we would open Burrumbeep too! The snow report wasn't favourable, but we were determined to go ahead. I can't recall now who all the other personnel were, but I think it was mainly Kilpatrick brothers. I invited a lady friend named Margot, as I knew she was a keen skier. I think she accepted more out of curiosity than anything else. She was a striking girl – tall, with long black hair, and was a beautiful skier. Kilpatrick jaws dropped when we entered the lodge. Margot could be slightly elitist, and made the comment on the drive up that she didn't approve of people skiing in jeans. "They should wear proper ski clothes." she said. I gently told her that she might need to adjust her ideas a bit, as she was about to spend the weekend with a mob from the bush. Of course there were jeans and even moleskins, but she thoroughly enjoyed the weekend. The snow was poor and none of the lifts were working, but we could see that the top $\frac{3}{4}$ of the summit run was covered, so why not! We all piled into and onto the Kilpatrick ute, and Bill drove us up the road to the bend just below the summit. A short climb up the hill, and we were at the top of the run. We got in a good ski, although we were jumping over the bare patches towards the bottom. We did this several times, taking turns at chauffeur, and finally retired to the pub, proudly proclaiming to be the only downhill skiers in Victoria that weekend, which was probably true. The Saturday evening in the new lodge became a joyful singsong around the gas heater in the centre of the wall where the large window now is. Illumination was by a single lightbulb

dangling through the window on an extension lead from McMillan next door. But Burrumbeep was up and running!

Power

We wired the building for 240 volts, and obtained a single-cylinder diesel Lister generator, which I think came from a farm in WA. Its Startmatic function (starting up when it sensed a load) never actually worked, so we just cranked it to life each evening. Pete Kilpatrick wired up a switch upstairs, so the last person to go to bed could turn the plant off without having to go downstairs. With additions to the building later on, more power was needed, and a newer twin-cylinder Lister unit installed. This gave good service until the mountain was eventually connected to the state grid. Gas was also supplied to the lodges at about that time. Prior to this we relied largely on diesel fuel for our heating, hot water and power. One disastrous year Esso-BHP decided to fudge their diesel production – I think by using a larger proportion of Bass Straight crude as the feedstock. The result was fuel which was not fit for purpose under cold conditions, with the diesel waxing out and causing blockages in equipment. We had a lift-pump outside to bring the fuel up from the underground storage, and this periodically failed. So the boiler would stop working. The Lister motor couldn't cope, and would grind to a halt. This usually happened in the cold of the night, and I have memories of struggling downstairs in pyjamas to try and get things going again. We should have sued Esso. I believe some large plant operators did.

Improvements

With good timing and the use of members' free labour, the Burrumbeep lodge was remarkably inexpensive. Inflation was taking off under the Whitlam government, and STI must have struggled to fulfil our fixed-price contract. We were probably just one of many clients, and I think the company unfortunately became insolvent. The very basic building has gradually been extended and improved as we have generated funds, with the flats being added, the useless verandah removed and the lower lounge built. The kitchen area was totally remodelled to the brilliant design of Jim Milledge. With the new bathroom layout the accommodation today is of a high standard. Maintenance and improvements have been done over the years as cash flow has allowed, and work parties have been vital in this, the main one often being in May. I've run quite a few in March, when there is a chance of better weather to permit painting and other outside jobs. Stalwarts like Mike Kermode and Peter Leake have made huge contributions in time and skill.

Skiing

After the memorable Opening weekend my first proper skiing at Mt Hotham occurred some weeks later. Good snow had eventuated, and Tim Lewis and I explored the mountain, particularly the runs serviced by the Brockoff pomma. Tim was a competent skier, but I remember finding some of the steeper slopes quite challenging, first up. Tim observed that I was turning more with strength than technique, and I am sure he

was right. I subsequently took a few lessons over the years. One was taken by a Japanese instructor named Ken Ito. He took his class up the top, and had us close our eyes and listen to the wind. "Become one with the mountain!" he exhorted us. Thinking it through, I think his point was that a good skier should be acutely aware of their environment: the sun, the wind, visibility, the gradient and the texture of the snow must all continuously be taken into account.

I enjoyed the old Brockoff runs. My record was 19 descents before lunch, although I think I then needed to retire to the pub. There were quite a few trees and the area was pretty and quite challenging in places. My favourite run was Harper's Gully (I think named after Jimmy Harper, a contemporary of my father). Harper's was treed on both sides and sheltered from both sun and wind, so consequently it always held good snow. I came across Zirky skiing there one day, and he paused to chat. I think it was a favourite of his too.

Mountain changes

Des Schumann owned the pub and the Ski Tows franchise. He was not popular, and was criticised for failing to develop the lift system in the face of increasing demand. Finally he sold up moved his operations to Canada. Development then did take place, opening up Heavenly Valley and the areas beyond with new lift systems. The main casualty was the old Brockoff area, where the vandals bulldozed and blasted away chunks of the mountain, removing most of the lovely tree cover. Plainly the object was to convert as much of the area as possible into Intermediate runs, for that is where the money comes from. The result was broad but uninteresting runs devoid of shelter and all subject to softening and freezing as the sun moved across the sky. Harper's Gully is no more. The mountain had its revenge a year or two later, when high rainfall caused landslips (the soil no longer held by trees), resulting in considerable damage to the bottom station of the new Heavenly Valley chairlift. I have to say that the other developments were excellent, providing some wonderful skiing on the far side. Gone were the days of making the long trudge uphill to ski Mary's Slide! Safety was also improved, particularly at the crossings of Swindler's Creek. The area at the bottom of Slalom Gully had sadly claimed one life.

Naming the newly developed runs was done arbitrarily and with no consultation with the Hotham community. Some of the old names were dropped. Apparently the girl behind the bar in Snowbird picked a chocolot bar off a rack and suggested to one of the developers that it had a good name for a run, so that idea was adopted. JFC was obviously blasphemous. Incensed by this, and talking to members of some other clubs, I suggested we should take action, and an ad hoc committee was formed, meeting a couple of times in Melbourne. Our demands were listened to and some more acceptable names finally adopted. The people had spoken!

The Pub

The Hotham Heights Hotel was an institution. It was run for some years by Leigh Kennedy, who also managed Ski Tows for Schumann. Some members stayed there when the lodge was being built, and many of us dined there, as well as in following years. Towards the end of one fairly convivial dinner we called for port, but Leigh apologised that the pub had run out. Muggins me said “That’s alright – I called into Browns on the way up, and there’s a flagon of it outside in the ute. We can have a bit of that.” Well, you guessed it - the flagon was empty by the time we left the table. The pub was fairly grotty, but it had great atmosphere and we were sad when it burnt down. I always thought it miraculous that all the occupants managed to escape the conflagration, as the building was an absolute rabbit warren.

Skiing overseas

In the winter of 1979 I joined Burrumbeep member Peter McPherson and a small group of friends for a week’s skiing in New Zealand’s South Island which he organised with Devon Cook, a friend of his living in Christchurch. Devon was a lot of fun, and left her husband at home to come with us as Tour Leader in our hired van. We skied Mt Hutt in powder snow, and gradually made our way to Queenstown, skiing at Coronet Peak. On one day Devon introduced us to an instructor friend called Stuie, who led us all on “a hoot of a run” called the Lunchbox. We trustingly followed him: the actual Lunchbox turned out to be a tunnel through a large rock, which we each entered at some speed. Emerging at the other end we were airborne, and for a terrifying split second all we could see was Queenstown, some thousands of feet below. In fact our skis were only about a foot above the snow, and the slope dropped away quite gently in front of us, but it was a heart-stopping moment. I took a lesson with an American instructor, who gave me a memorable tip: I had been having trouble getting my weight sufficiently forward, and his simple advice was “Ski through your big toes.” On our final day the experts in the group went heleskiing on the Remarkables, and I and the two American girls skied the Tasman Glacier with a guide, being taken to the top in a Cessna equipped with both wheels and skis. It was an amazing experience, and the beauty of the ice was breathtaking. It was a memorable week for us all.

Later that year I headed off overseas on a long-planned travel saga, mainly back packing. I managed to do a little skiing – a day here and there in France, Austria and Switzerland – all on the cheap, staying in youth hostels and fairly grotty pensions, although one hostel in the centre of Bad Gastein in Austria was like a beautiful ski lodge, and skiing out the door I caught an integrated lift system that took me progressively across three adjoining mountains and a train (with ski racks) back up the valley – all on one ticket! A fabulous experience.

Later, wandering around New York I passed the premises of booksellers Barnes & Noble, and they were having a sale. A little book caught my eye with the intriguing title *Skiing from the Head Down*. The sale price was \$1.00, so I snapped it up. It turned out to be the best thing I have ever read about skiing, written by two psychologists, both

keen skiers. The first chapter should be required reading for anyone taking up the sport. It describes the physiology experienced by the beginner about to ski down a slope: subconscious fear kicks in, and the body reacts by straightening the legs and leaning back – the exact opposite to the posture needed to ski. With this simple piece of knowledge the skier can work on overcoming the problem. The book adapts much sport psychology to skiing, detailing many tricks to improving one's performance. It was a good buck's worth.

Families

When Burrumbeep began, most of us were single (and probably behaved accordingly). Facilities for families were lacking, and one member is still remembered for complaining when a baby was being washed in the kitchen sink. As time went on members married and produced families. Building the flats solved many problems, and Burrumbeep became the family club that it remains today. For parents, shepherding their offspring through their skiing development has been sometimes frustrating but ultimately very rewarding. Enrolling them in ski lessons of course has the secondary benefit of freeing up the mums and dads for their own skiing! Our daughter Kate became a competent skier, and in my later skiing years it gave me great pleasure to ski with her, often fast on the steeper runs, with her ability and stamina eventually far exceeding her Dad's.

Fun

Work parties and skiing holidays produced much fun and camaraderie over the years. On one hilarious week early on I had invited up John Hamilton, an old mate from Tasmania. David Omen was there at the time (in fact I think Dave was there for the season). Omen and Hammo got on well, and did a bit of skiing together. They decided that we should have a party, and during the course of one day invited most of the mountain to Burrumbeep that night. A large part of the mountain did turn up, and the joint was really jumping. We had recently ditched the grotty seagrass matting and laid lovely grey Berber carpet through the living area. Well, the party went on into the small hours. I finally staggered out of bed in the morning and inspected the damage. It was carnage. Everything you can imagine has been spilt on our new carpet, and I was convinced that it was irredeemably wrecked. Anyway, we set to with mops, detergent and vacuum cleaner, and cleaned it all up. Unbelievably, the carpet was perfect! I was so impressed with woollen Berber carpet that I installed some in my own little house.

Driving up the mountain

(Non-petrolheads can skip this section)

The road up from Harrietville is very different from the Mt Beauty to Falls Creek road, although the distances and altitudes are similar. The former follows most of the line of the old gold miners' track, while the Falls road was well engineered by the SEC. We once counted the corners on the Harrietville road. I think there were 64 – most of them tight. In the early Burrumbeep years the road was sealed only up to The Meg. The

remainder was rough in dry weather and a mixture of mud and slush through winter. I've always enjoyed driving, and approached the road as a challenge and a bit of fun. Not long before we began the build at Hotham I had coaxed my mother out of my late father's sturdy old Valiant wagon and into a low-mileage Peugeot 504. There was strong self-interest involved, as I often borrowed the car on weekends to drive to Hotham. The 504 was arguably the best thing Peugeot ever did. It was a comfortable fast tourer (often sitting on 80mph on the long straights past Myrtleford), and with its independent rear suspension had excellent traction, which I further enhanced with a pair of Michelin Mud & Snow tyres during the winter months. It was brilliant in snow, and I recall driving up the hill to the pub on more than one occasion. Around this time I was doing field trials with high-tech molasses blocks for sheep and cattle, and had a company ute for this. Often I would just happen to finish my week in NE Victoria, so only needed a short drive to Hotham for the weekend. In loading a ute there is a trade-off between traction and handling, and I learnt to judge roughly how many blocks in the back were optimal for driving up and down the mountain. Negotiating the slush became fun. Going into a corner you put a bit of angle on the steering wheel and then steered around the bend with the accelerator – more revs would bring the tail out further. Later on I bought myself another French gem – a Renault 16TS – probably the most underrated car on the market. It was fast, comfortable and remarkably roomy – it would sleep two in the back with the rear seat removed. It enabled some fast trips up to Hotham, and was good in snow. I discovered that one advantage of a front wheel drive car is that when you put chains on it you get enhanced steering and braking compared with using chains on the back wheels.

On one occasion I was going up to the lodge for a May work party, on my own in the Renault, and as often happens in May there had been a significant fall of snow. Knowing the hazards of CRB Hill I stopped just before it to fit my chains. I think there were a couple of other members behind, who also stopped. One car didn't stop. It was Tag Gray in his dodge ute, with Peter McPherson as passenger. Not having chains, Tag gunned it up the hill to gain momentum, and they disappeared from view. The next thing I knew was a crash and a shower of sparks just up the hill. Kneeling by the front right-hand wheel of my car I felt a bit vulnerable. Apparently they made it almost to the top, but lost traction and began to slide backwards. "I think we're in big trouble, Pete!" Tag was quoted as saying. He did a pretty good job of keeping the ute on the road as it hurtled down backwards with increasing speed. To slow down he steered the back corner of the ute into the embankment on the uphill side of the road. This had the desired effect, and he was able to bring the car under control down on the flat near us. Some lessons were learnt that night.

Finally the penny finally dropped in government circles that there was money in ski tourism, and the road was sealed, along with the electricity cable buried under it. It made the climb up from Harrietville safer, quicker and easier. It is still fun, if you can get a clear run. I have found around 30 minutes to be a comfortable time up the hill, without pushing too hard. I did give it a good squirt once in the Audi 4.2 Quattro which

we had a few years ago, which was fairly quick. We did it in 25 minutes, but Roz went rather quiet. I never rush going down the hill – why wear out the brake pads? Cyclists are now an increasing hazard on that road, and care needs to be taken accordingly.

Of course with snow and fog the road can still be very hazardous, with much care needed. Many vehicles have gone over the edge over the years, many of them 4WDs, with overconfidence probably a big factor. Steve Brown once gave me a vivid description of experiencing one such event as passengers in a quite new Range Rover when he and his wife did the trip with friends. The car end-for-ended several times down the slope until finally stopped by a tree. Both front and rear screens popped out, and the two children were found sitting in the snow. Mercifully no one was injured. A recovery truck with a long cable winched the Rangie back up. Every panel was bent, and it was a write-off.

It was noticeable how the introduction of fuel injection increased the performance of petrol engines, driving up the mountain. Alpine air carries less oxygen, so carburetted engines tend to run rich. Modern injection compensates for this. Diesel engines can have problems under cold conditions, so Alpine diesel is sold in Myrtleford and Bright over winter, and diesel drivers are advised to fill up with it. Three of us with diesel vehicles had a delayed departure after an autumn work party a couple of years ago after a cold snap. The engines started, but refused to rev beyond an idle for some time until their fuel systems had warmed up.

Some boasting

We have had heaps of fun at Burrumbeep, and made such good friends over the years, and I have tried to contribute as much as I could to the Club, which has also has been enjoyable. The building and development of the lodge taught me new skills, and the fun we had doing it all has been immense.

An early invention of mine was the Silent Door Closer, spawned one night out of sheer frustration. In the building's original configuration there was a sliding door at the top of the stairs, essential to keep the warm air in and the cold out. Often it was not properly closed – usually by people going out, leaving an annoying cold draft for those in the living area. This had occurred too often, and in a rare flash of inspiration I saw a possible solution. I drilled a hole in the side of the door frame and passed a length of cord through it, attached to the top of the door. I tied a champagne bottle to the other end, dangling outside the door frame. As a fulcrum for the cord I nailed on a 26 oz Foster's can horizontally which held the bottle slightly away from the frame and provided enough friction to let the door close slowly as the bottle fell. The closing speed was fine-tuned by adjusting the volume of water in the bottle. Amazingly the set-up worked, and gave good service for some years until the door was removed when the lower lounge was added. Perhaps I should have patented it.

I had a bee in my bonnet about energy efficiency, and having experienced winters in Europe and North America realised how better adapted countries there were to cold

weather then we are. Heat loss through single-glazed windows in a heated building can be huge when the outside temperature is at freezing or below. I am sure I was a thorn in the side of the John Tulloch presidency, and when the old wooden-framed bedroom windows needed replacing I was disappointed when budgetary constraints led to more single glazing. The new aluminium-framed windows also resulted in a security problem: a slight push from outside would flex a locked pane so that the locking brackets separated and the window could be slid open. I don't think we had any equipment stolen, but we did have squatters enjoying the accommodation on one occasion, with all the power and heating switched on. Later when John Slattery was president a Committee decision was made to double glaze, and I recall touring a couple of factories in Melbourne's eastern suburbs to choose a supplier. I think our decision was a good one. The windows we now have were actually manufactured in England, and so far have proved very durable. (A competitor we visited had its product made in China. It was more expensive, and the fittings looked fragile.)

I was also struck by the craziness of running the freezer and fridges in a hot room in order to keep food cold, needing considerable use of electricity. I was reminded of years before when food was put out on the verandah to chill, at zero cost. Obviously we couldn't put the fridges outside, but couldn't we use some of that cold outside air to cool the fridges? And so the Fridge Cooling Project was born. Mike Kermode helped me with the modifications – partitioning off the area at the rear of the fridges and insulating it from the rest of the pantry. A fan draws cold outside air in past the heat exchange grids on the back of the fridges and exhausts it into the pantry area. In cooling the fridge backs the moving air is warmed, and blowing it out into the lodge interior helps to warm the room – a win-win result – you pay for the electricity, but use it twice. Meanwhile the fridges work more efficiently, so less electricity is needed.

More skiing

My skiing gradually improved over the years (I am a slow learner), and I delighted in tackling Hotham's steeper slopes. It is a wonderful mountain, and I commend the original Committee for their decision to build our lodge there. There was a NASTAR (whatever that stood for) event regularly held on Sun Run, where entrants were timed over a slalom course, the idea being to try to improve your time over subsequent events. I had never raced, but it seemed a good challenge. In the morning before, the Ski School were offering a "NASTAR Clinic", so I enrolled. It turned out there were only three of us in the class, so it virtually became a private lesson. The instructor was an enthusiastic young yank, and we basically just skied the mountain, with him pushing us hard and constantly giving each of us tips on technique. It was the best lesson I ever took. I did the slalom course and acquitted myself reasonably well. However I shall always remember the antics of the bloke before me. When cued, the competitor stands in the starting gate and then takes off when ready, pushing aside a wand at ankle height which starts the clock running. This bloke must have been watching the film *Downhill Racer*, recently released, and like the hero in the movie he was lunging forward on his stocks, lifting the rear of his skis high off the snow. Finally he burst out

of the gate. He must have buried his ski tips in the snow, because both bindings released and he face-planted in the snow, injuring his pride but little else.

I grew to enjoy moguls. There was always Snake Gully – the vandals hadn't destroyed that. Another favourite was Blue Ribbon, straight down under the lift line, if the groomers stayed off it. I finally worked out the laid-back way of skiing them: slow down just before, and instead of skiing around them like everybody else, ski over them. There is a brief frictionless moment on the top when you can effortlessly rotate your skis in the desired direction. Easy!

Roz and I downhill-skied together often, until eventually she developed an uneasiness with heights – obviously a problem on the steeper slopes, so we switched to doing more cross-country skiing, which we had both enjoyed in the past. It offers fitness, relaxation, beauty, and it's free! I found that I got as big a buzz from the beauty of the High Plains on a sunny day as I did from blasting down a black run. In fine weather we went out on the high areas, and in bad weather we skied the many trails down towards Wire Plain. They are mostly sheltered, and skiing between snow-laden snowgums is a lovely occupation. The langlauf stride is a relaxing and efficient means of locomotion. The only problem I had with cross-country was a lack of precise control. I had eventually got to the point with downhilling where I could get my skis to do pretty much what I wanted, but not so with the skinny boards. I never mastered the Telemark turn.

My skiing was pretty gung-ho in the early days, and I sustained a few injuries along the way, but the worst occurred late in my skiing career, and – surprisingly – on cross country skis. Early on a fine morning Roz and I set off to ski to Mt Loch. We had done it before, both skiing and walking, but the views never palled. The trail was well-skied, and fast in some places where the sun had yet to soften the surface, sheltered by trees. In a down section out above the Heavenly Valley area I let my speed increase a little, while Roz followed at a more sedate pace. Rounding a bend I was confronted by a ski touring group with large packs, sprawled right across the track, polluting the mountain air with cigarette smoke. I bellowed "Track!", but there was no way that they could move in time. On downhills I probably could have stopped, but not on cross country boards. I had a very fast choice to make: either keep going, where with a bit of luck I might have killed one or two of the bastards but not done myself much good; or take to the trees. I scraped off as much speed as I could and speared off into the snowgums. The foliage slowed me down a bit, and I probably would have emerged unscathed on the other side except that a low branch must have caught my ankles, ceasing progress of my feet while the rest of me hinged forward to land full length on hard snow. I was totally winded, and realized that my left shoulder was dislocated. The woman leading the touring group had a sat phone and quickly called up the ski patrol. At least that was one thing she did right. I could have told her what I thought of her stupidity but was incapable of speech at the time. The patrol blokes sledged the remains to the medical centre where I was prodded, x-rayed and the dislocation reduced, which took four people heaving in different directions and was not fun. They did a great job but neglected to tell me that I had also cracked a couple of ribs. This

fact revealed itself back in the lodge when some bugger kept cracking jokes, and I found laughter rather painful.

Bushwalking

Having access to Burrumbeep opened up prospects of summer enjoyment in the mountains, particularly bushwalking. We have been up there when it was 42 degrees in Melbourne and a pleasant 27 at Hotham. The area is green and the views inspirational. There are wonderful seasonal displays of wildflowers. The mountain administration is encouraging activities in the Green Season, as it has now been dubbed.

There are many worthwhile bushwalks in the area, of varying distance and difficulty. A couple of us once walked the Razorback, camped to watch the sunrise on Feathertop and walked down to Harrierville on the Bungalow Spur – hard on the knees, lugging a backpack. In later years Roz, Kate and I did many walks, sometimes with guests we invited up. Most of the walks have been well documented over the years and are easy to follow. An interesting one is to Mt Tabletop (the flat-topped one in our view from the lodge). It begins at JB Plain down on the Omeo road.

Burrumbeep fun

There were many highjinks over the years. In one family (which shall remain nameless) the father sustained nocturnal injuries on more than one occasion, and one little daughter was observed entering the dining room at Jack Frost in pyjamas late one night, asking “Is my Mummy here?” Of all the fun we had at Burrumbeep, many of the highlights were the President’s Weekends, and we attended many of those over the years. The dinner on the Saturday night often had a fancy dress theme. Standout images that come to mind are of Chappie dressed as a bishop, and John Tulloch as a Parisian derro with a string of onions around his neck and a plonk bottle sticking out of his coat pocket. Possibly the best costume of all was Dolly the Sheep. Long ago I had the pleasure of house-sharing in Hawthorn with Debbie Robinson (Elrington) and Ruth Diprose from Hamilton. For this particular dinner the theme was Shearing, which among others produced several male members in blue Jackie Howe singlets, and a slick city lawyer issuing Repossession notices for farms and wives. Ruth had been invited as she and her husband were visiting from Queensland, and she came superbly dressed as Dolly the Sheep. As the night wore on a couple of the shearers decided that Dolly should be shorn, so she was manhandled onto the dinner table and ceremonially defleeced.. I think this was enjoyed by everyone except Ruth, but she handled the indignity with good spirit.

I think I was Secretary when Peter McPherson was President, and then much later I was on the Committee under John Slattery. On several occasions he and I attended the annual stakeholders’ meeting held in Melbourne by Mt Hotham Resort Management. We were given presentations on developments, and it gave us the

opportunity to mingle with board members and people from other clubs. The CEO appeared to run the mountain with ruthless efficiency and he struck me as having a somewhat autocratic management style. On the last meeting I attended he boasted of the wonderful deal he had made, buying a number of buses retired from the Sydney transport system, at a rock-bottom price. But you only get what you pay for, and it wasn't long before a growing graveyard of dead busses appeared down by the maintenance sheds.

Conclusion

I am writing this on the eve of the Club's 50 years duration – half a century! Over the years the Club has given us wonderful skiing and companionship. Roz and I have made many lifelong friends as a result, and I shall always be grateful to all those who have shared this friendship with us.