

Koomerang Ski Club

50th Anniversary Celebration Dinner

The Cardinal Club, Scotch College

Saturday 26th May, 2007

Program

7.00pm	Pre-dinner Drinks
7.45pm	Introduction Mr Tony Sheer, Master of Ceremonies
7.50pm	Blessing of the Snow The Very Reverend Anton von Fraserburg
8.00pm	Entrée
8.15pm	Welcome Mr Nigel Watson, President
8.30pm	Audio-visual Presentation
8.45pm	Main Course
9.15pm	Mr Greg Champion – Entertainer
10.15pm	Dessert
10.30pm	Tea and Coffee
11.30pm	Evening Concludes

Pianist: Clare Duffy

The Mount Buller Lodge: 1957 - 2007



Buller Lodge 1957



Buller Lodge 2007

Menu

Entrée

Smoked Salmon on a potato pikelet with fresh horseradish
crème fraiche and salmon roe

Main

Chicken breast with a Mediterranean stuffing on roasted sweet potato,
parsnip and zucchini with crispy fried leek

Eye fillet of beef on a caramelised onion and potato wedge
with wild mushrooms and a broad bean ragout

Dessert

Crème brûlée

Tea and Coffee

Freshly brewed coffee with a selection of fine teas

Attendees at the 50th Anniversary Dinner

Abercrombie, Andrew	Gibson, Tom	Mahoney, Cathy	Sloane, Angus
Abercrombie, Shadda	Gowan, Deirdre	Mahoney, Don	Sloane, Cathy
Aberdeen, Nina	Gowan, Robin	McDonald, Cheryl	Sloane, Jocelyn
Aberdeen, Paul	Gray, David	McDonald, Don	Sloane, Peter
Aitken, Pat	Hall, Cheryl	McDonald, Graeme	Smith, Bill
Alexander, David	Hall, David	McDonald, Katherine	Smith, Caroline
Anderson, Sally	Hall, Jenny	McDonald, Liz	Smith, Elaine
Aunger, Craig	Hall, John	McKellar, Carolyn	Smith, Karleen
Aunger, Sally	Hall, Joyce	McLarty, Ewen	Smith, Randall
Bisset, Andrew	Hall, Peter	McLarty, Meg	Stahle, Deborah
Bisset, Karen	Hall, Rhonda	MacLean, Rosemary	Stahle, Peter
Black, Chrissy	Hansen, Margaret	McNab, Cathy	Strangwood, Richard
Black, Tim	Hansen, Max	McNab, Rod	Strangwood, Susie
Boness, Cheryl	Hendy, Barry	Moignard, Beatrice	Thompson, Guy
Boness, Tim	Hendy, Catherine	Morley, David	Thomson, Ian
Boykett, Rebecca	Hoelter, Christopher	Olorenshaw, Campbell	Thompson, Ricky
Boykett, Stephen	Hoelter, David	Olorenshaw, Taara	Tingate, Bill
Brotherton, Natalie	Hoelter, Rhonda	Paterson, Andrew	Tingate, Margaret
Caraher, John	Hoelter, Samantha	Paterson, Kris	Todd, Diana
Caraher, Kate	Immurs, Susie	Paterson, Sophie	Todd, John
Chang, Andrew	Jeffreys, John	Peacock, Lucy	Townsend, Di
Chang, Anne	Jeffreys, Sue	Peacock, Warren	Townsend, Rick
Clinton, Neil	Jowers, Gareth	Pearson, David	Van Holst, Hans
Crawford, Andrew	Kaleski, Andrew	Picken, Ian	Van Holst, Sheila
Crozier, Scott	Kerr, Richard	Picken, Margaret	Vroland, John
Dartnell, John	Kerr, Ros	Presgrave, Rebecca	Vroland, Robyn
Dartnell, Terri	Lamb, Andrew	Ramsay, Louise	Wallace-Smith, Andrew
Dartnell, Victoria	Law, Gail	Ramsey, Andrew	Wallace-Smith, Louise
Docker, Hugh	Law, Tony	Reid, Barbara	Wallace-Smith, Patty
Docker, Jo	Leviny, Elizabeth	Robison, Alan	Wallace-Smith, Simon
Draffin, Anna	Leviny, John	Robison, Heather	Watson, Nigel
Draffin, Doug	Lilley, Andrew	Roche, Danni	Watson, Rosemary
Draffin, Jonathan	Linley, Peter	Rodd, Jane	Whitehead, Ian
Draffin, Margaret	Linley, Thea	Rodd, John	Williams, Andrew
Edgell, Cynthia	Lipshut, Alan	Rust, Helen	Wood, Robin
Esnouf, Stuart	Logie-Smith, Andrew	Rust, Ian	Wright, Dianne
Esser, Kim	Logie-Smith, Jane	Sargeant, James	Wright, John
Esser, Max	Macrae, Finlay	Shearer, Christine	Young, Colin
Fairlie, John	Macrae, Marli	Shearer, Tim	Zacharakis, Kym
Fairlie, Sue	Magennis, Andrew	Sheer, Prue	
Gibson, Stewart	Magennis, Jenny	Sheer, Tony	

KOOMERANG SKI CLUB

Inc. Scotch College Ski Club

The First Fifty Years

1957 – 2007

**Launched at the
50th Anniversary Celebration Dinner
held at the Cardinal Club
Scotch College
Saturday 26th May, 2007**

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Acknowledgements

Pat Aitken

John Caraher

Doug Draffin

John Fairlie

David Gray

David Hall

Peter Hall

Liz McDonald

Cathy McNab*

Peter Sim

Ian Thomson

Andrew Wallace-Smith

Nigel Watson

* Special thanks to Cathy McNab for converting all the stories, comments and photographs contributed by members into a narrative that makes interesting reading.

Thanks to all Koomerang members who contributed. Most of the material submitted has been included, and what appears in this history covers the important milestones and personal comments.

Introduction

In 2007 Koomerang Ski Club, incorporating the Scotch College Ski Club, celebrates its 50th anniversary.

Your Committee is not prepared to allow this our anniversary to pass without celebration. As part of this celebration, we are publishing this history which has been updated from the history last published in 1997/1998.

The Club has grown from a small group of enthusiastic and visionary skiers to a thriving Club which offers its members excellently located facilities at each of our four main resorts.

The strength of Koomerang is not just our facilities but our members. Koomerang is not just a Club offering accommodation to old boys of Scotch College but includes as members many wives, daughters and sons of old boys. The Club is run by an elected committee of members and the Committee has always reflected the range of members and has had two female Presidents.

The Club has been fortunate over the years in having many active volunteers on the Committee all offering differing areas of expertise such as building, property, financial, administration and legal. We have been fortunate that the vision of original members has been carried on by successive Committees which have always managed to not only look after day to day operations but to plan for the future of the Club.

The members, both past and present, who have contributed to making Koomerang what it is today are too numerous to mention. This brief history is our way of recording our achievements and expressing our appreciation to them.

I would also like to express appreciation on behalf of our members to our life member and Honorary Secretary Doug Draffin who gladly accepted the task of chasing contributions and updating this history.

Nigel Watson

President

May 2007

Presidents of Koomerang Ski Club

1957 – 1962	Bruce Wenzel	1986 – 1988	Andrew McDonald
1962 – 1964	Michael Wood	1988 – 1990	Peter Sim
1964 – 1967	Dr. W.E.I. Littlejohn	1990 – 1992	Rhonda Symon
1967 – 1969	Doug Draffin	1993 – 1994	John Fairlie
1969 – 1970	John Vroland	1994 – 1996	Ian Picken
1970 – 1973	David Gray	1996 - 1998	Andrew Wallace-Smith
1973 – 1975	John Todd	1998 - 1999	Jim Frame
1975 – 1977	Jim Shepherd	1999 – 2002	Will McCutcheon
1977 – 1979	Tony Sheer	2002 – 2004	Don McDonald
1979 – 1982	Scott MacLean	2005 - 2006	Neil Hart-Smith
1983 – 1986	Pat Aitken	2006 -	Nigel Watson

Life Members of Koomerang Ski Club

Michael Wood	Howard “Buster” Berry
Colin Scott	Andrew Lamb
Tony Law	Scott MacLean
Doug Draffin	Tony Sheer
David Gray	Pat Aitken
John Caraher	Peter Sim
Elizabeth McDonald	Andrew Logie-Smith
Jan Sloane (dec.)	Neil Hart-Smith
Don McDonald	Rhonda Hoelter

Koomerang History 1957 – 2007

Over its first 50 years, Koomerang has grown from a small group of enthusiastic and visionary skiers to a thriving Club with a membership of around 700.

This growth has accompanied the evolution of skiing from an almost ‘frontier’ hardship sport into one of comfort and accessibility. Limited and basic uphill facilities have been overtaken by the resorts making major investments in lifting facilities, slope grooming and artificial snow making.

Initially, Koomerang was established with one very basic lodge at Mt Buller. Fifty years on, there are lodges at Mt Buller, Falls Creek, Mt Hotham and Thredbo making Koomerang the only ski club in Australia with a lodge at each of the four major ski resorts.

This is a brief review of the milestones in our Club’s history followed by some recollections of past events submitted by members.

‘Koomerang’

Our name, ‘Koomerang’, was chosen by a group of foundation members and comes from an aboriginal word which means ‘Mountain in the Clouds’.

The origins of the Club

The idea of a Scotch College ski club and ski lodge was initiated in 1956 by two school boys, Peter Trace and Andrew Broad. They raised the subject with a teacher at Scotch College, Colin Scott, while they were all at Mt Buller for a ski weekend.

The idea gathered support and sketch plans were produced by Bob Trengrove for a lodge at Falls Creek. A draft constitution was produced by Peter Wilson, a Scotch teacher, and was presented to the Principal, Mr. Selby-Smith. It was then discussed by the School Council, who considered this was not the type of project with which the school should become involved.

Peter Trace and Colin Scott then discussed the idea with Michael Wood, an old boy, a skier and a builder. As other old boys and parents became involved it gathered momentum as a club for both school boys and old boys. The location of the proposed site was changed from Falls Creek to Mt Buller. The Ski Club of Victoria was approached and agreed that a lodge could be built on the high part of its site. The plans were modified and by 1957 they were approved. A further draft constitution was prepared and the inaugural meeting was held to get things under way.

The early days and the building of the Mt Buller lodge

The Club was fortunate in having a most enthusiastic and capable foundation member in Michael Wood. Michael was a keen skier and a professional builder and it was his encouragement, drive and desire to see the Buller project completed that continued to move the building on, despite setbacks, to completion. For a Club with no money, wonders were achieved.

The site at Mt Buller was cleared by a band of enthusiastic members, prefabrication of the building commenced in Melbourne and on-mountain work parties were held every weekend, until by the start of winter 1957, a basic building was in use.



Buller lodge and stone work 1959

The building consisted of an unlined shell. The only heating was a central fireplace and electricity was generated by a generator in the basement. Donations of equipment were plentiful and included the generator, cooking and other appliances and bathroom fittings. Fund raising commenced and as money became available, more of the building was completed.

In July 1959 there was a major setback. While people were asleep in the lodge, a fire broke out which very quickly engulfed the roof of the building, which was still unlined. Fortunately no one was injured and the main structure of the building was saved. The remaining shell was supported and with a concentrated effort from the small band of enthusiastic members working every weekend from October to the following June, a new building was built.

This building was officially opened by the President, Bruce Wenzel, on the Queen's Birthday weekend of 1960, when a timber 'burning bush' and school crest carved by Norman Trace were unveiled in front of members and invited guests from around the village.



The burning bush unveiled by Peter Trace and Liz McDonald (Trace)

The first Die Brettln

In 1960 when the Club had 98 members, the first edition of the Club magazine, Die Brettln was published. The name was suggested by Liz McDonald (Trace) who was also the founding editor and is an Austrian word which means 'the Boards', as skis at that time were made of timber.

Site tenure at Mt Buller

By 1962, the Mt Buller building was finally completed, and was considered by members at that time to be quite luxurious. Electricity, warmth, cooking, good bathrooms with hot water and flush toilets – what else could skiers want?

Around this time the Club realised that the lodge was built on land which was part of the annual permissive occupancy of the Ski Club of Victoria and therefore did not have permanency of occupation. Negotiations started to subdivide the site from the larger site and to convert the annual permissive occupancy to a longer term lease in the name of the Club. This work was handled by Dr Bill Littlejohn, who had become President in 1963, and was successfully concluded in 1964.

In 1964, in view of the need to enter into a formal lease, the Club became an incorporated body as a company limited by guarantee under the Companies Act 1961. Prior to that time, the Club had been an unincorporated association.

The occupations of the Committee members who incorporated the Club provide an insight into the breadth of the then membership of the Club.

Name	Occupation
Bill Littlejohn	Medical Practitioner
Colin Scott	Teacher
Peter Sloane	Agricultural Scientist
Doug Draffin	Company Director
Tony Law	Chartered Accountant
Peter Nicholson	Student
Gus Wilson	Student
Barry Evans	Student
Phillip Goodwach	Student
David Gray	Clerk
Peter Hall	Chemical Engineer
Bill John	Student
Alan Robison	Mechanical Engineer
Elizabeth Trace	Secretary
John Vroland	Civil Engineer
John Winkleman	Student
Mike Wood	Builder
Howard ("Buster") Berry	Solicitor

Building the Thredbo lodge

From the early 60s, several members started investigating where Koomerang could establish a second lodge. Mt Hotham was considered, but the Thredbo Village, opened in 1957, was thought to offer the potential of better facilities and the Thredbo management company was actively encouraging clubs to take up sites.

A site in the Thredbo village was chosen by Peter Sloane and Doug Draffin in 1964. Plans were drawn up by Andrew Begg, an old boy and an architect, and after much discussion by the Committee, followed by a special meeting of members, approval was given to build a lodge at Thredbo.

Fund raising commenced and the contract for the major part of the building was let to the Sigma Building Company of Thredbo, which was owned by Bela Racsco and Steve Szeloczky. This company built many of the early Thredbo buildings.

Under the guidance, driving force and with the principal involvement of Peter Sloane, voluntary work parties were held nearly every weekend with members travelling from Melbourne to complete the work not included in the builder's contract.



Thredbo – choosing the curtain material 1965

Arch Robison, David Gray, Jan Sloane, Doug Draffin and Jos Sloane

At that time, Thredbo was a nine-to-ten hour drive from Melbourne, with the road from Khancoban through to Thredbo being not much more than a dirt track. By June 1965, the Koomerang Lodge at Thredbo was open for use

In 1970, the sitting room was extended and until 2004 the only other alterations were to conform to the upgraded fire regulations.

Acquiring the Falls Creek lodge

By 1972, the membership had grown to 250. The Committee put forward a proposal to redevelop the Mt Buller lodge and submitted this proposal for approval by members at an Extraordinary General Meeting.

Before this meeting, a small group of members led by Nigel Watson, had unsuccessfully urged the Committee to defer the Mt Buller proposal and to first acquire a site at Falls Creek. The group identified the Committee's objections to expanding to a third mountain, prepared a proposal which met those objections and put their proposal to the Extraordinary General Meeting.

The members present at the meeting voted almost unanimously to defer the redevelopment of Mt Buller and agreed that the Club should first explore acquiring a lodge at Falls Creek.

One objection which had been raised by the Committee was the difficulty in locating a site and of designing and building a lodge which would be completed by the next season. However, the group of members had identified a site near the Frying Pan in the centre of the Falls Creek village, on which the construction of a block of four apartments was about to get underway.

The Committee inspected the plans and negotiations commenced before the building structure was started, for Koomerang to purchase two of the four apartments. John Scarborough, a foundation member of Koomerang and an architect, volunteered to work on changing the plans for the two apartments to make them more suitable for Club use.

The Committee then called a further Extraordinary General Meeting of members, which unanimously approved the Falls Creek project.

A number of work parties were held to complete the fit-out. The bedroom and sitting room furniture were built in Melbourne and stained and spray painted at the vehicle repair workshop of a then Vice President, Jim Shepherd. The disassembled furniture was delivered to Falls Creek where the fit-out and assembly was completed by Club members.

The building was completed and ready for use by the 1973 season.

As a result of these developments, the membership of the Club grew as the wider Scotch College family realised that they could join a ski club with lodges on three different mountains

Repairs to Mt Buller

By 1977 the Committee considered that it was time to improve the standard of accommodation in the original building at Mt Buller.

In 1978, the bedroom end of the Mt Buller building was demolished and replaced with a new bedroom wing with improved accommodation, bathrooms and heating.

Acquiring the Mt Hotham lodge

In 1981, it was finally decided that the Club should consider acquiring a lodge at Mt Hotham. The Trace family, who were foundation members of Koomerang, had built their own small eight-bed lodge in the Davenport subdivision at Mt Hotham in 1963.

In 1981 they advised the Club that their lodge would be offered for sale and asked whether Koomerang would consider purchasing this lodge.

The Club was interested and negotiations commenced. By April 1982, Koomerang owned a lodge at Hotham.

Koomerang was then established with four lodges on four different mountains and a membership which had grown to 600.



The Mt Hotham Lodge

Maintaining and rebuilding the lodges

The four lodges require regular maintenance and at times, extensive renovations.

Mt Buller

In 1987, the remaining section of the original building at Mt Buller was replaced and the second floor flat was added, which took the total bed capacity of the lodge to 42.

Ten years later, in 1997 and 1998, further major alterations were made. These included the lower bedroom floor, which was completed in 1997, and the upgrade of the remaining bedrooms in 1988. Further major refurbishment took place during 2005/2006 with new carpet fitted throughout the building and new beds installed.

In early 2007, the whole building was repainted.



Buller lodge today

Falls Creek

In the early days, access to the Falls Creek flats involved walking up a steep hillside from Summit Rd. In heavy snow this was treacherous, as was slithering down from the lodge to the road. In the late 1980s a staircase was built to all the Imaj flats, making access safe and easy. Koomerang led the negotiation with the other flat-holders and was responsible for the staircase design.

Both flats at Falls Creek were rejuvenated for the 1997 ski season, and over 2005/2006, new kitchens were fitted to bring the flats up-to-date.

Major redevelopments at Thredbo and Hotham

1997 to 2005 was a period of consolidation, with limited annual maintenance to buildings and no major work. This resulted in the accumulation of Club funds which could be used for the major developments that were becoming necessary.

Building a new lodge at Hotham was the Committee's first priority. However, there were many difficulties with extending the lease and environmental issues. These difficulties meant that any development at Hotham could not occur for several years.

Meanwhile, the Thredbo lodge was clearly ready for an upgrade. After 40 years, the standard of accommodation it offered was very much past its use-by date. Although still used by some members, many others were choosing to stay elsewhere where the accommodation was more comfortable.

Thredbo

In 2003, a Thredbo sub-committee was formed under the chairmanship of Nigel Watson, to consider options for the lodge. The sub-committee recommended an upgrade and extension to the existing building. A local Thredbo builder, Andrew Fairfield-Smith was chosen, plans were prepared by the builder with the sub-committee and the architects Robin Dyke, Daryl Jackson. By 2004, the plans were completed and applications were underway for approval by the relevant authorities.

The members met at an Extraordinary General Meeting in January 2005 and unanimously approved the project and the estimated costing. The building work commenced the following day and was completed in time for the season opening and ahead of the budgeted cost of \$680,000.



The new Thredbo lodge

The old building was completely stripped to its shell and this space now contains an enlarged living area, new kitchen, two new bedrooms and bathroom, ski room and drying room. A new entry was created at the rear of the original building, on what is now the mid-level. A new bedroom and bathroom wing was added on two new levels above the mid level. The fit-out with new furniture was coordinated for the Club by Living Edge Interiors in Sydney.

The result is a most comfortable and attractive building, retaining accommodation for 16 people, but with a new level of ski lodge accommodation not usually experienced with this type of building.

As the word passed around, bookings for the 2006 ski season opened with the lodge nearly fully booked for the entire season. Since then bookings for the summer season have also increased.

Attention then turned to the Club's 'flagship' lodge at Buller, which in 2005/2006 was given a major face lift both inside and out at a cost in the vicinity of \$125,000. At the same time, the Falls Creek kitchens and living areas were refurbished.

Payment for all this work on the three lodges came entirely from accumulated Club funds.

The Mt Hotham lodge – a work in progress

The appreciation expressed by members for the high standard and the comfort of the Thredbo building and the increased bookings, gave the Committee the confidence to pursue redevelopment at Mt Hotham.

It was now nearly 25 years since the Hotham lodge was purchased by Koomerang and it offered accommodation for only eight people at a standard much below that of the other three Club lodges. Additionally, the Hotham lease had expired and reverted to a permissive occupancy.

Because Koomerang occupies one of the larger sites at Hotham, under the terms of the Mt. Hotham Board of Management, our site was designated for future and major development, in accordance with the Board's master plan. This required intensive redevelopment to around 90 beds.

Early in 2006, a Hotham sub-committee was formed under the chairmanship of Committee member Bill Heath. It determined that the size of the development required was clearly beyond the capability of Koomerang and negotiations commenced in March 2006 for a joint development, which would use the site as required, while providing Koomerang with a high standard of accommodation for 16 people. On-site undercover parking was also to be provided.

Plans were developed with the builder's architect and at an Extraordinary General Meeting of members held in July 2006, the members gave unanimous approval for the project to proceed.

Commencement was planned for October 2006; however this was delayed when numerous objections to the project were received by the planning authority.

The Hotham sub-committee has continued working with the development company, Colonade Homes, until the time of printing. Changes have been made to the proposed building to conform to the changes requested and it is anticipated construction will start in October 2007 with completion for the 2008 ski season.

In the meantime, the original Hotham lodge continues to be available for members.

Snowsports at Scotch

Initially, Koomerang established and encouraged the Interschools ski racing. However this program has outgrown its small amateur beginnings and is now professionally run. The extensive parental support and encouragement required by the school boys is now given by the parent-organised support group 'Snowsports at Scotch'.

A close working relationship has been developed between Koomerang and Snowsports. After just three years, Snowsports is a large group and even during the poor snow season of 2006, still involved nearly 90 Scotch boys at all levels of skiing from beginners to ski racing. Koomerang now provides sponsorship for some of their racing and provides accommodation as required at the Buller lodge.

Memories of Koomerang – Members Contributions

What follows is a collection of memories from Club members, many of whom have been in the Club from its beginnings. Liz McDonald encapsulates the qualities of the Club and its importance in the lives of many members:

Many fantastic friendships have endured the 50 years of the Club, many who made the all-night trips to Thredbo, many who battled the elements at Buller, the often difficult access, the setback of the Buller fire. These friendships are very special and we look back and think how incredibly lucky we have been to be part of such a wonderful Club.

Skiing in the early days

Skiing itself was a different activity in the 1950s and 1960s from the technically advanced sport of today. Skis were made of wood and boots of leather with laces. Tows were primitive and walking uphill was sometimes the only option.

At Buller, Bull Run was the favourite as it had a 'lift'; actually a rope tow. To ride the tow, a wide leather belt was attached around the hips, on which was a 'nutcracker', a metal device which clamped onto the rope. Hooking on was an art, as was lifting the nutcracker over the pullies on which the rope ran.

At Mt Hotham, day excursions were required to reach Spargo's hut on the far side of the Diamantina Valley, the Orchard Run, Loch Spur, the Joyce Brockhoff Hut and the Summit. These were undertaken on skis as there were no tows and frequently 'skins' were attached under the skis for the uphill tramp, taken off at the top and tied around the waist for the downhill run. The skins were made of sealskin, which was replaced by webbing after the slaughter of seals was forbidden.

Famous moments while building the Mt Buller lodge

The Club used some remarkable items of machinery to assist the early members to construct the lodge. For some unexplained reason all of these things were painted orange – long before the lift company of that name was in business.

The first of these items was a four wheel drive Ford Blitz truck affectionately referred to as ‘the Blitz’. These vehicles were developed for use by the army in the Second World War and afterwards were used for many rugged applications. Our vehicle was alleged to have been used by the Gas and Fuel Corporation.

The vehicle was powered by a V8 engine and could not be said to have been totally reliable. Despite the imperfections, most of the materials that came from Melbourne to Mount Buller were carried on this vehicle, as was the stone required to build the outside walls and the original fireplace.



The Blitz truck

One of the more hair-raising events in the life of ‘the Blitz’ occurred early in 1960, one Friday night when transporting a load of building materials and bags of briquettes to the lodge for a weekend working bee.

Three Club members, including Ian Thomson, left Melbourne at about 8pm for the long and uncomfortable trip to the mountain. Mirimbah was passed a little after midnight and the ascent on the mountain road commenced. In those days there was no traffic control point at Mirimbah, the road was considerably narrower than today and, of course, did not have a bitumen surface.

By 1am 'the Blitz' was close to White Bridge, which had a white bridge then, when the wheels on the left side of the vehicle caused the edge of the road to give way. 'The Blitz', the cargo on the tray and the three Club members became airborne! Fortunately the descending vehicle, when upside down, hit a substantial tree side-on. The load on the tray held the truck at such an angle that the sharp leading edge of the cabin dug into the ground and the truck hung over the steep descent to the Delatite River.

The three terrified, but uninjured, Club members scrambled out and climbed up to the road where eventually they were able to get a lift to the lodge in a passing car. Later 'the Blitz' was extracted from its resting place and continued to be of service to the Club.

Another travel-related story centres on a hair-raising trip back to Melbourne after a weekend work party. Liz McDonald, Mike Wood and Doug Draffin were returning home from Buller in Mike Wood's Land Rover, with Liz sitting on a wooden box between Mike and Doug. While they were racing around the curves of the Black Spur, Liz commented on the excessive speed. Mike replied, "Don't worry, if we have an accident you won't know anything about it, you're sitting on a box of dynamite!"

Dangers lurked not only in the transport arrangements, but also in the drinking water. The basement housed the generator and an in-ground galvanized water tank, which had a flip lid. An oily film on the surface of black coffee alerted members to the possibility of foreign objects in the water tank, which were subsequently identified as dead rats. The water couldn't be wasted, but was certainly well-boiled before it was used in any further drinks

Another invaluable piece of equipment used in constructing the Buller lodge was a second hand concrete mixer, purchased by five enterprising members: John Caraher, Ian Thomson, Archie Robison, Doug Draffin and David Gray. They formed a private company, 'Bullcrete Pty Ltd', with a paid up capital of ten pounds. The concrete mixer was then hired to the Club and contributed to the construction of both Buller and Thredbo. It then went into involuntary liquidation!



Bullcrete Pty Ltd in full force, Buller 1959

The most dramatic and major setback for the Buller lodge was the drying room fire during a work party on 26 July 1959. The ceiling of the unfinished building was made of bitumen-filled insulation paper, which quickly ignited and spread the fire from one end of the building to the other.

At about 3.30am the work party members woke with burning bitumen falling everywhere. They set to work putting out the fire using buckets, fire extinguishers and helpers borrowed from the surrounding lodges. Christopher Wood put in an enormous effort removing the large number of 44 gallon drums of petrol for the generator, which were stacked in the basement.

Fortunately no one was injured, but the wooden roof frame was mostly burnt leaving the roof in urgent need of support.

The next morning, Mike Wood and Doug Draffin drove to Melbourne, borrowed a large truck and returned to Buller. They drove up and down the mountain all day and night, bringing loads of timber from the Saw Mill Settlement at the bottom of the mountain to the lodge. The timber was used to prop up the roof, to prevent it caving in under the weight of snow. The drivers lived on chocolate biscuits for the 48 hours of continuous mountain driving, but the main part of the building had been saved and secured against the elements.

Work parties

From the beginning, the Club properties and the Club spirit were developed at work parties. During building, these were held every summer weekend and long weekend at Buller until after the fire in 1959. At Thredbo they were held on 12 weekends during the 16 week construction period.

In the early work parties at both Buller and Thredbo, members helped with building, making furniture, including bunks and tables, installing light fittings, collecting firewood, painting, printing the kitchen wallpaper at Buller and constructing the rock walls.



The Buller kitchen 1959

‘snowham’ wallpaper made by Jan Sloane and donated equipment

Eventually when there were four lodges to maintain, work parties became regular long weekend events at all lodges, particularly at Easter when painting, wood stacking and repairs were carried out.

Since the early 90s, with the involvement of members in a wider range of other activities, volunteering for work parties has diminished and consequently there has been less dependence on the members and more on contract labour.

Meals were always a challenge at work parties, with groups of 25-30 people wanting to eat at much the same time. At the Easter 1957 work party, Liz McDonald (Trace) and her mother Lottie prepared meals in the hut of the Melbourne Tech Ski Club, a small building with a mud floor and a wood-fired stove. They fed thirty people around a 10-seater table in three sittings, in an atmosphere of fun and good humour.

Group catering evolved into a work party tradition. At early work parties everyone had brought a contribution, however sometimes in the serving of the meal a person who had brought up a fine piece of steak was served up a sad-looking sausage. To remedy this, a communal approach developed with the production of a large meal such as a roast for all participants. Frequently these nights became great fun and 'formal' dinners were planned. A bow tie around a roll necked skivvy or a fancy necklace helped with the après ski attire.

In 1978, the only 'wedding' solemnized in a Koomerang lodge was held at Thredbo during the Easter work party two weeks before Rod McNab and Cathy Allcock were to be married. A preliminary 'warm up' ceremony was deemed to be required. Pews were set up in the living room, the bridal veil and the hats worn by the guests were sourced from the kitchen cupboards and Doug Draffin competently performed the ceremony.



The Wedding in Progress

Some very heavy snow falls occurred during building and work parties, including at the Anzac weekend of 1961. All the provisions for the weekend had been packed in boxes with the expectation of driving to the lodge, but unfortunately cars had to be left at the winter car park, and members had to walk to the lodge carrying their backpacks and the boxes of food. Libby McKay's box disintegrated in the wet soggy conditions, the grapefruit rolled over the snow into the recently dug septic tank hole, which was half full of snow and from which they had to be retrieved. Jan Sloane struggled up with the toilet seat around her neck.

Going to Thredbo for a weekend was exhausting and required planning. To make the most of the weekend a few hours sleep were snatched after work and car loads of members were collected from around the suburbs at about 2am. The driving was shared, and Thredbo was reached in time for breakfast and the start of the day's activities. Saturday night was a relaxing social occasion with full-on work on Sunday, packing up for the drive back to Melbourne about 4pm.

As all skiers know, weather in the mountains is extreme and can change rapidly. On one drive from Melbourne, Doug Draffin and Michael Wood encountered floods at Leather Barrel Creek. Turning back, their VW Beetle almost floated over the rapidly rising river at Brigenbrong. Undaunted, they pushed on to Albury, Canberra, Cooma and Jindabyne, reaching Thredbo 27 hours after leaving Melbourne.

On the occasion of signing the building contract, a quick trip to Thredbo was required. Peter Sloane arranged for a friend to fly himself, John Vroland and Doug Draffin to Cooma in a small plane. The plane became lost over cloud and when it cleared they were over the ocean. It was suggested that they turn and fly higher to find land. When this was done the pilot followed the road from the coast back to Cooma, where the party was to be collected and transported to Thredbo by Bela Racsco.

As the group had not arrived at Cooma at the agreed time, Bela had left the airport and set off back to Thredbo.

The group got back into the plane and followed the road until they located Bela's Nissan Patrol driving back down the road to Thredbo.

To attract attention, they flew low and threw toilet paper out of the plane. Bela got the message and they all met up at the Cooma airport.

The Thredbo landslide

In 1997 Bimbadeen and Carinya Lodges at Thredbo collapsed and slipped down the hillside at 11.35pm. Police arrived at 12.30am and a regional disaster was declared. Eighteen people died and only one survived, Stuart Diver, a ski instructor, who was pulled from the wreckage 65 hours later.

The aftermath of the landslide caused the closure of the Thredbo lodge for 18 months.

Initial reports indicated that the landslide was behind the Youth Hostel, which is just below Koomerang. The Club President, Andrew Wallace-Smith, rang the lodge and was delighted to speak to a member who had managed little sleep that night “due to sirens and a bit of action down in the village”. Later Andrew found out that there was another Youth Hostel at the other end of the village!

After the disaster the village was completely surveyed and each lodge given a risk rating, taking into account the location, slope, proximity to the Alpine Way, spring water activity, run-off water and other factors.

The Coroner’s report stated that the landslide was caused by water from a leaking water main. The Supreme Court judgement blamed the leaking water main pipe and the Alpine Way, which was built on debris, as the cause of the disaster.

Subsequently the Koomerang Committee was advised by the insurance company that our lodge was no longer insurable due to the ‘high risk’ rating it received. This was caused by the stability of the Alpine Way adjacent to the site and the amount of spring water at the rear of our lease. The Committee had no choice but to close the Thredbo lodge as it had neither public liability nor building insurance.

Over the next 18 months an enormous amount of work was carried out in the village, particularly on the Alpine Way behind our lodge. This significantly reduced the risk and our lodge was given a much lower and safer risk rating in early 1999, which enabled it to reopen for use that winter. Before that a small work party of Wallace-Smith family members visited the lodge to restock, make repairs and to remove the hundreds of Bogong moths that had managed to get inside over the last 18 months.

Fund raising and social functions

As with most sporting clubs, Koomerang has needed to raise funds to supplement its income.

Progressive dinners were popular in the 60s and Koomerang held them for about three years. The hosts included the Sloanes, Browns, Bush family, Woods and Traces. Each course was served in a different house, with all participants moving between houses during the evening. There were no booze buses in those days!

Fashion parades in 1961 and 1962 featured clothing modelled by members. The venues were the Kasbek Restaurant in 1961 and Nine Darling Street in 1962, with Geoff McComas from 3DB compèring. Fashion parades were re-instated for a few years in the 1980s and featured ski clothing. At least one was held at the Observatory café.

In 1958, a cook book of family favourite recipes was compiled and literally put together by members, who cut, photocopied and pasted, as no money was to be spent. There is a copy of the book at Thredbo and the recipes are still used by some today.



Compiling the cook book, Margie Hansen and helpers

Tennis days, wine tasting and theatre nights were successful fund raisers at different times. However, for many years the social highlight of the Club was a pre-season event, frequently a breakfast, which was accompanied by the annual blessing of the snow by Father John Dartnell.