

Introduction to Book 4 1971 — 1980

Sam Conlon introduced me to the club at the 1970 October long weekend. I joined the club in February 1971, so I can include some of my own reminiscences and photos in this introduction. There was one week of overlap of the school and university vacations in August, and our participation in club activities was largely restricted to skiing that week and attendance at the AGM.

Annual General Meetings were preceded by a dinner in order to secure a quorum. This resulted in good attendances, but had the disadvantage that those who arrived after the dinner found that the caterers had only provided seating for the number booked for the meal.

During the school holidays, the lodge was always filled with families with school-age children and school teachers. This gave me an exaggerated impression of the part played by families in the affairs of the club. One family which was important was the Wilkinson family. Bruce Wilkinson was the club president until his employer, Commonwealth Bank, moved him to their Darwin branch in 1974.

In 1972, the Warrugang team won the Perisher Plate. The team was M. Wilkinson, T. Wilkinson, G. Wilkinson and R. Tobias. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find a photo of the team. The best I can do is to include here a photo of the Wilkinson family at dinner in the lodge.



Michael, Wendy, John, Helen and Bruce Wilkinson, Gloria Campbell, Bruce Keating, Don Campbell, Helen Keating. Standing – Barbara Williamson.

(Photo by Geoff Wilkinson)

Jurgen Manthey continued until 1974 as Lodge Manager, assisted by his wife Leslie and his mother Anna. In 1972, when Leslie went into labor, the family disappeared from the lodge. Barbara Williamson, who had experience as an assistant manager, took over and prepared the dinner for the guests. Jurgen turned up later that evening with many bottles of Bodega to celebrate the birth. The Board minutes record that Bruce Wilkinson had to reprove Jurgen for his neglect of his duties. It seems that this neglect was forgiven, as the Board went on to make Jurgen an ex gratia payment on the birth of his child.



Jurgen, Leslie and Anna Manthey (Photo provided by G. Wilkinson.)

In 1974, George Failes became president and Peter and Carol Grant took over the management of the lodge. Christopher and Adrianna Blockley managed the lodge for the 1978 and 1979 seasons, and Michael and Jane Cruise were the managers for 1980.

Lift tickets were sold either in strips of 12 single ride tickets or as day tickets costing about the same as 18 single rides. This led to calculations – would the state of the snow, length of the queues, time attending to children allow one enough runs to get value of a day ticket. I recall skiing with Sam Conlon one Saturday morning when he had commitments in Sydney requiring him to leave Perisher by midday. We decided to buy day tickets, and headed for the double chair, then the only lift serving the Mt. Perisher slopes. Few people were skiing Mt. Perisher that day. We would ski down without pausing, staying close to the lift. There was no queue, so straight onto the lift, resting on the ride up, then another quick run. As I recall, we completed 23 runs that morning and Sam left at midday, happy that he had got the value of his day ticket.



Judith Barnes, aged 6, with her strip of lift tickets (Photo by Don Barnes)



Ian's favourite run (Photo by Don Barnes)

Ian Barnes, and many other children, had a favourite run, starting from Lift 6 (now known as Lawson) going across towards Lift 5 (now known as Blaxland). The track across the slope made by the children can be seen in the above photo. The resort management tried, unsuccessfully, to discourage this run. There was a clear risk of collisions with skiers coming down the slope from Lift 5. Fortunately, the slope was not very busy and skiers found enough room to avoid one another.

The Warrugang weekly races were held on gentle slopes so that everyone could take part. They were conducted very informally. A fall did not exclude a skier. One could get up, if necessary, climb back up to a missed gate, and continue the run.

As more members acquired partners and families, the dormitories were becoming less and less appropriate accommodation. There was agitation for further extension to the lodge. In 1972 in time for the ski season, the upper floor was built. It had 4 double rooms with ensuite bathrooms, and a room known as the retreat, officially access to the fire escape, but sometimes used for teenage parties. Instead of dormitories, the Lodge now had 10 double rooms for guests and a very small basement flat for the management with an approved total occupancy of 22.



John Bible and George Failes inspecting progress
(Photo by J. Brennan)

To maintain at least the appearance of propriety, the Booking Officer adopted a policy that a man and woman sharing a room should have the same family name. This resulted in people using family names by which they were not normally known. Another procedure was for two men and two women to book, and to make an exchange of rooms not shown on the displayed accommodation list. With changing attitudes and changes of Booking Officer, this policy was quietly dropped. It had never been formally adopted by the Board. There is no mention of it in the minutes. Years later, I had been unable to make a booking during the members priority period as members of my family were uncertain of commitments which might interfere with plans for skiing. When these commitments were clarified, I found that only my (then teenage) daughter and myself were free to go skiing. I phoned the Booking Officer and asked if she could fit us in. After some thought, she said she could, but we would have to share a room. I checked with my daughter who said she did not mind sharing with me, so we confirmed the booking. As we were about to terminate the call, the booking officer said “Don’t tell ...”, naming a previous Booking Officer.

It was accepted that people arriving after midnight did not count in the number sleeping in the lodge. So people would arrive in the early hours of Saturday morning and try to sleep in the lounge. (The booking week was from Saturday to Saturday back then.) This gained the Saturday morning skiing. This had disadvantages. One had to leave Sydney in very heavy traffic on the Hume Highway which then was mostly only two lanes and had few overtaking lanes. There was no parking in Perisher. One had to park at Sawpit Creek, wait around in the cold bus station and then travel in an overcrowded shuttle bus to Perisher. The bus unloaded about where the Skitube station is now and one had quite a long walk in the snow to get to the lodge. I did this a few times before deciding that the extra skiing was not worth the discomfort involved.

For people arriving during the day, a system developed avoiding the use of the shuttle bus. One would drive into Perisher as far as allowed, usually about level with the White Spider. One would unload gear and family, and drive back to Sawpit Creek. On the way out of Perisher, one would pick up someone wanting a lift to Sawpit. At Sawpit, he would get his car, vacating a convenient parking place, and give you a lift back to Perisher where he would collect his family and luggage ready for the trip home. This worked well until the opening of the Skitube in 1987 made it unnecessary.

Release bindings were now universal, but the settings were unreliable. Guests were exhorted to check their bindings every morning, and each morning, people would be seen in the ski room doing so. The settings had to be firm enough that the binding would not release under the forces of a normal turn, but loose enough to release in a serious fall. As expert skiers turned harder than novices, they needed tighter bindings. Not all who thought themselves expert were. To check the heel release, one would put on one ski. With a friend standing on the tail of the ski, one would pull the heel up out of the binding by stepping forward with the other foot. One had to judge by feel how much force was required to pull the boot out of the binding. Judging the toe release was even more uncertain. One would get a friend to kick the side of the boot near the toe, and try to assess what force was needed to break the toe out of the binding. To reduce the guesswork, the club acquired a toe release testing device. The ski would be placed across the bed of the device so that



Release Check
(Photo by D. Barnes)

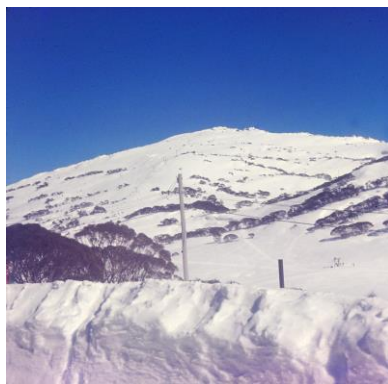
pulling the handle towards the boot would press the spring-loaded piston against the toe of the boot. This would force the piston into the cylinder until the binding released. A leather ring on the piston would mark how far the piston had been forced into the cylinder and the force required to break the boot out of the binding could be read from the scale on the piston. The arms could be swung back to raise the bed for the thinner metal skis which were replacing the old wooden skis. I do not recall ever seeing anyone using the device, perhaps because we did not know how to use it. It is many years since I last saw anyone checking bindings. Are modern bindings so much better that it is no longer necessary? With this in mind, David Arens and I in August 2010 tried out the Release Check on modern equipment. We found that modern ski bindings hold the boot substantially above the ski and that the piston missed the boot completely, passing between the boot and the ski.

Downhill skis were being made of steel instead of wood, and were becoming shorter. (In 1975, I replaced my old wooden 210 cm skis with 170 cm steel skis which the shop assistant insisted were much too long.) They still had straight sides. There were no ski brakes. Ankle straps were used to prevent runaway skis. Boot manufacturers were experimenting with plastics. Plastic boots were rigid, giving the skier better control of edges than did the slightly flexible leather boots. There were some problems at first. Some plastics become brittle when cold, and there were stories about ski boots cracking. I heard one story (unverified) of a skier falling and breaking out of his boots instead of having the bindings release.

Parallel turns were started with an up and down movement during which, one changed edges and shifted ones weight. The up and down movement unweighted the tails of the skis allowing them to start moving sideways. Starting the turn was easier if one could use the side of a convenient bump in the snow. Simply skiing on the side of the bump freed the tails of the skis and slipping down the side started the turn. In the process, a little snow would be scraped off the side of the bump making it steeper, and away from beside the bump, increasing the height. With skiers using both sides of the bump, it would over time develop into a column of hard-packed snow called a mogul. In places like the approaches to lift queues where lots of skiers would be making turns, patches of moguls would develop. In these patches, skiers had little choice but to make their turns on the sides of the moguls. These days, snow grooming prevents the development of mogul patches in the normal skiing areas. Artificially constructed mogul patches are used for some competitions.

Cross-country skis also were changing. The first “waxless” skis appeared about 1970. They were long and thin, slightly arched in the middle. They had Teflon soles, smooth at the tip and the tail, with a fish scale pattern on the middle section. The springiness of the arch was supposed to be matched to the weight of the skier. In theory, one could glide on the smooth sections with the arch keeping the pattern clear of the snow. The action of transferring weight while stepping forward was supposed to press the pattern into the snow, preventing the ski from slipping backwards. The match of weight to springiness cannot have been critical. Touring skiers normally carried a backpack whose weight would depend on what the skier expected to need on the trip. Racing cross-country skiers continued to use waxed skis. The choice of wax depended on the expected snow conditions. The standard excuse for a poor performance was “I had the wrong wax.”

In 1974, there was a substantial snow bank across the road from the lodge. Children carved faces in it.



Mt. Perisher and the snow bank



The faces

(Photos through the common room window by I. Barnes)