

# WARRUGANG NEWS



## BOOK 1

THE STORY OF WARRUGANG

1950 - 1962



## Preface

After Jim Brennan's death, his collection of Warrugang papers and photos was passed to me. In the collection was a complete set of Warrugang News. Jim had already made photocopies and put them in the bookcase in the lodge, bound with plastic comb binding. This form of binding does not allow any identification on the spine, so their presence is not obvious to anyone glancing at the bookcase. Also, the photocopies are not easy to read. I thought I would try to produce something which would make the old newsletters more easily available to club members, perhaps online or as CD Rom and in nicely bound and clearly identifiable volumes in the Lodge.

The early newsletters were produced by the printing method used in those days for all small amateur printing jobs. The duplicating machine, usually known by its brand name, Roneo or Gestetner, had a drum with an ink pad to which a stencil could be attached. With each turn of the drum, a sheet of paper would pass through the machine pressed against the stencil. The paper had to be somewhat absorbent, so that wet ink would not lie on the surface and be smudged when the next sheet landed on the output pile. But this meant that the ink also spread slightly, so the print was never sharp. It also meant that the ink would sometimes soak right through and spoil the other side.

A stencil blank consisted of a porous sheet with a wax coating, protected by a backing sheet which was discarded before the stencil was put into the duplicating machine. The stencil was cut using a manual typewriter (another now obsolete device!). When a key on the typewriter was pressed in normal typing, a hammer with the raised outline of a letter on its face would strike a carbon-coated ribbon to print the letter. To cut a stencil, the ribbon would be moved out of the way and the hammer would cut through the wax. The pressure on the typewriter key was critical. If the key was not pressed firmly enough, the hammer might not cut right through the wax for the whole of the letter and parts of the letter would fail to print. If the key was pressed too firmly, it could damage the porous layer underneath, allowing too much ink through. Typewriter hammers tended to accumulate dirt in letters like "o", "e" and "c" resulting in them printing as indistinguishable blobs. Typing errors could be corrected with some difficulty. A waxy correcting fluid could be painted over the letter to be corrected and then the correction typed, a time-consuming process. As the correcting fluid resulted in wax of uneven thickness, the new letter often was not cut through cleanly, resulting in poor print. Consequently, minor errors were often left uncorrected.

All these faults are to be found in the old newsletters, exacerbated by the ageing of the paper. For this reason, I began making transcripts. I have tried to retain the layout and general appearance of the originals while correcting typing errors. I have also tried to correct the spelling of people's names. In this, I have been greatly helped by Libby Loneragan and Myrna Burke who have been proof-reading my transcripts and advising me on the spelling of names.

There were no newsletters in the first years of the Club's existence. I have tried to fill this gap by writing a document I have called "Prehistory", the story of the Club before its written history began. Much of the information has been given to me by Barbie Graham and Don and Brenda Pinkstone, who have augmented their own recollections by consulting friends who took part in the early activities. I have also used minutes of Board meetings and notes in Jim Brennan's photo album, from which I have copied photos. Bob Cater and Don Pinkstone have also given me photos.

The technology of the old newsletters could not reproduce photographs, though line drawings were possible. I have also added some relevant photographs copied from Jim Brennan's album to the newsletters. There are not many relevant photos. More would be welcome, if anyone can provide them before we have the collection bound



## PREHISTORY

(or what happened before Warrugang News)

Warrugang Ski Club was started by a group of friends, mostly former geology students, who had participated in some visits to the Kosciusko National Park. In December 1950, a Sydney University Students Geological Society excursion was organised by the society president Cliff McElroy. The party included future Warrugangsters Jan Horder (now Arrol), Greta Fox (now Ridler-Dutton), Harry Mladek, Barbie Graham, John Barrie, Jenny Gillham (now Wilson), Don Pinkstone and Brenda Whitworth (now Pinkstone). They went by bus to Kiandra and, over 10 days, walked to Spencer's Creek where they rejoined the bus. They had to carry tents and all their provisions. They were warned that their packs had to be limited to what was considered a reasonable weight to carry on the walk, 40lb for the men and 30lb for the women. The packs were weighed before the start of the walk. Brenda Pinkstone recalls her resentment at being asked to carry someone else's excess baggage, her own being under the 30lb. By the end of the trip, she had run out of food, not having packed enough. The bus took them to the summit and then to the Kosciusko Hotel (where Brenda enjoyed a nice bar of chocolate after her short rations) before heading back to Sydney. To save on the weight being carried, the party was allowed only one camera. Participants were able to purchase prints of the photos.



Near Kiandra 14/12/1950



Camp at Arsenic Creek 17/12/1950



On top of Mt. Jagungal 18/12/1950  
(Photos provided by D. Pinkstone)

In December 1951, there was another Geological Society bus excursion with Bob Cater, Barbie Graham, Harry Mladek, Jenny Gillham and Lois Nasmith among the participants. There were substantial snow drifts all along the main range. This was the first time Barbie and some of the others had encountered snow. On a patch on Mt. Gungartan, they had toboggan races using ground sheets and getting very wet in the process.



Tobogganing on Gungartan 18/12/1951

(Photos provided by B. Graham)



and climbing back up

Shorts were the preferred wear for this activity. They were about the only clothes still dry at this stage of the trip. They did not stay dry for long.

One of the group, Harry Pemble, was able to borrow a truck and the driver Stan from his parents' trucking company. He took a party to the snow in the winter of 1952 (9 – 17 August). The journey from Sydney to the snow took 12 hours each way, not surprising since beyond Canberra, the only bit of sealed road was in Cooma. The truck was similar to the trucks used by the army for troop transports. It had a canvas cover stretched over a frame over the tray. Some of the party found dry spaces in some derelict DMR huts, others camped in the truck as most of the hut floors were wet with melting snow. Barbie Graham recalls that the truck was quite warm because of the number of people sleeping in it and that she was surprised in the morning when opening up the truck produced a shower of icicles. Of the 27 in the group, only two had ever skied before and there were no instructors and, of course, no lifts! Barbie reports that to learn to ski, they just pointed their skis straight down and let them go, “descending the slope in a series of exuberant crashes”.



Group on first Harry Pemble truck visit (Photo provided by Bob Cater)

There were 16 in the group who elected to “ski” (actually trudged on skis) from Smiggin Holes to the Chalet on 13 August. There was a poma there which the party found so much fun that

they lost track of the time. They also wore off all the wax (needed in those days for all forms of skiing) from the soles of their skis. They had to plead with the Chalet Manager for overnight shelter.

A similar trip was made in 1953. This time they found that the huts had been demolished. They were allowed instead to camp in the ruins of the old Kosciusko Hotel. John Barrie had split his only pair of trousers which had to be repaired by Barbie Graham while he was wearing them, Paul Hoelscher supervising.



Barbie Graham repairing John Barrie's trousers



Jan Horder and ruins of old Kosciusko Hotel

(Photos provided by Bob Cater)

By this time, Barbie had acquired a little booklet with diagrams showing how to do snowplough turns. She reports skiing with this in hand, trying not very successfully to follow the instructions with the inevitable result.

One night, while the party was sheltering in the hotel, someone remarked "I wish we had a lodge of our own", to which came the reply from John Barrie "Let's build one." The idea of building a hut had been raised, but at that stage, no action was taken.

A small group which included Don and Brenda Pinkstone, Harry Mladek, Harry Pemble, John Barrie, and Bob Cater (known as "Fiery" because of his red hair) went on a camping trip to the Kosciusko National Park in January 1954. Heavy rain made camping impractical. The party was allowed to stay at the University Alpine Club lodge for a few days. At this time, the only lodges in the whole of Perisher Valley were UAC, CSIRO, Snow Revellers, and Telemark. Someone (probably again John Barrie) remarked "Wouldn't it be great if *we* had something like this". This time, the remark was taken seriously and when the party returned to Sydney, they contacted their friends and talked about building a lodge. As some of the group had relevant skills, it was thought that a lodge could be built relatively cheaply using amateur labour. They grossly underestimated the cost, which was fortunate. A realistic estimate might have deterred them from attempting to build the lodge. A committee was formed with Don Pinkstone as president, Brenda Pinkstone as secretary, Fred Bendeich as treasurer, and also Harry Mladek. Peter O'Halloran's brother was a solicitor and he wrote the articles of association, Colin Branch's father, (who was an architect) drew up some plans. A party visited Perisher at Easter to select a site. Harry Mladek went by motorbike with Barbie Graham in a sidecar. The rough road shook bits off the bike. They had to put the chain back 29 times between Canberra and Perisher. They spent Saturday morning fixing the bike while the others chose the site for the hut. Curley Humphreys also came by motorbike, with Lois Nasmith in a sidecar. They had similar problems with their bike and spent Easter Monday repairing it. The view of the Perisher range was the main reason for the choice of the site. A further advantage was that it was near the quarry at the side of the Kosciusko road which provided a convenient place for people working on the



construction to park and unload materials, since the present upper road did not then exist. A water supply would be needed. They found a stream south of UAC, high enough on Mt Wheatley to give a gravity feed to the Warrugang site. There is a story that Lois Nasmith played water diviner to find the dam site. There were, however, several geologists in the party who probably took additional factors into consideration.



Survey Party – Harry Mladek, Barbie Graham, Dave Hopkins, Brenda Pinkstone, Lorene Horder, Pat Stoney, Neville Stevens, Ted Jacobs (Photo by D. Pinkstone)

Kosciusko State Park Trust's approval was obtained and work preparing the site began in late 1954.



Bulldozer preparing the site (Photo by D. Pinkstone)

The Club was formally incorporated on 23/12/1954 and the Inaugural Board Meeting was held on 18/2/1955. Construction of the hut by club members began in January 1955.



Brian Williams constructing piers (Photo by D. Pinkstone)





Greta Fox and Brenda Pinkstone hauling sand



Plumbing operations C. Falconer, B. Pinkstone, J. Horder



Wall and roof taking shape  
(Photos by D. Pinkstone)

Cedric Falconer took a year off from his medical studies at Sydney University to spend time doing the plumbing. To provide a water supply, a dam was constructed of tongue and groove boards set in an almost vertical position. The dam was at the site selected the previous Easter on the far side of UAC. This required a long pipeline to be laid.



Digging the pipeline (Photo by D. Pinkstone)

A work party at Easter made the hut (almost) habitable. A septic tank was constructed.



Septic Tank Construction (Photo by D. Pinkstone)



The finished Hut (Photos by K Wood)

Most of the building materials were bought from Hain & Co. in Cooma. The Club was allowed to run up a large debt with the company which was amazingly patient in being willing to wait a long time for payment.

In preparation for the ski season, several members of Warrugang made their own skis. Reg Humphreys, a scientist in the Forestry Commission, had published a paper detailing the use of Australian timbers for making plywood skis. The method was to make a heavy solid wooden ski-shaped base (called a jig) of timber and clamp three layers of different Australian woods onto



it, each layer glued to the adjacent layer. When the glue had done its job the clamps were removed and the skis coated with an appropriate clear sealer and bindings were then attached. The jig used by the Warrugang members was made by Bruce Barlow with some help and encouragement from his friend Bernie O'Brien. The skis worked well for the first season or so, but with time, some started to warp slightly which made skiing more difficult.

Though the hut still needed much work, it was used for the 1955 ski season. Arthur Currie was appointed caretaker. The hut was cold as the walls were not lined.



The unlined kitchen (Photo by Bob Cater)

Wind and snow blew in under the eaves.



Barbie Graham sweeping snow 10/7/1955  
(Photo provided by B. Graham)

Cooking was done on a coke-fired Aga stove with three hotplates and two ovens. Lighting was provided by Tilly lamps. Hot water was provided by a coke-fired boiler in the basement with a holding tank in the roof. The only heating in the hut was the open fire in the common room. Guests had to sleep in sleeping bags on the floor. Even so, the membership reached the limit of 150, and the Board had to stop accepting new members and institute a waiting list.



Common Room – Walls lined, but fireplace without mantle  
(Photo by D. Pinkstone)

Myrna Burke as a school-girl, was fascinated with the idea of skiing and longed to try it, but never got to go on a school excursion to the snow. She finally got the opportunity to try skiing when Jim Craig, who had a car, took Myrna and her sister Margaret (better known to club members as Margaret Sim) to Warrugang for the 1955 October long weekend. She recalls the thrill of seeing snow-covered mountains for the first time when the car reached the crest of the hill coming out of Cooma.



The Hut, October 1955

(Photos provided by M. Burke)



Myrna Burke and Jim Craig

Jim broke an ankle during the weekend. Being the only driver in the party, he had to drive the return to Sydney, which he did wearing his ski boots to try to keep the bones in place. Skiing evidently came up to Myrna's expectations. She joined Warrugang and gave many years service to the club as a director and as booking officer. She is still an active skier.

After the 1955 ski season, the Club was in financial difficulties, owing a lot to Hain & Co. To raise the money to complete the hut, the club members at the AGM agreed to increase

the membership to 180 and to increase the joining fee to £25. There was concern about accepting school teachers or others whose use of the hut would be restricted to school holidays.

During the summer of 1955-56, electrical wiring was installed, but the Club could not afford to buy a generator at that stage. The ceiling was completed, doors and window sills were painted and wall of the earth dam was raised to improve the water supply. Bunks were constructed by Harry Mladek's father and the walls were lined, those of the common room with vertical weatherboard. The fireplace still lacked the mantle.



The Hut in winter 1956 (Photo by C. Brew)

In winter 1956, Vince Coles was Hut Manager. There were still no ski lifts. Johnny Abbotsmith, with the assistance of some Warrugang members, put a diesel motor on a sledge and took it up the hill below Telemark Lodge facing Mt Piper, and set up a rope tow.



Setting up the tow (Photo by Bob Cater)



Marge Fels on the tow (Photo provided by B. Graham)

It was a year of a lot of snow. Barbie reports that, in early October, the manager had already left, and she and a friend, the last in the hut, had to leave and lock up the hut because they had run out of food, fuel and hot water and had only candles for lighting.

Stan Ververka was appointed Hut Manager for the 1957 season. [*The minutes of directors meetings indicate that Bob Strizek also to some extent served as caretaker.*] The Club



was struggling financially with liabilities exceeding available funds by more than £1000. In view of the financial position, the purchase of a generator was deferred. The building of a mantle and a granite surround for the fireplace was commissioned by the board, but the work was not done until the next summer. The 1957 season was regarded as successful due to the improved comfort of the Hut and the presence for the first time of a ski instructor in the valley.

Over the 1957-58 summer, excavation, construction of flooring and related work was done on the basement. The fireplace surround and mantle were constructed.



Harry Mladek, Jan Horder, Brenda Pinkstone, Don Pinkstone and John Barrie  
The fireplace has its surround and mantle. (Photo by Bob Cater)

Ski Instructor Adam Zapenski was appointed Hut Manager for the 1958 season. The storeroom at the back of the hut became the hut manager's accommodation.

At long last, a generator was purchased and installed by Ron Sim in a space under the stairs. Electric lights were installed in time for the 1959 season, but it was a case of lights out at 9 pm. Harry Kaye (known as Dirty Harry) was appointed Hut Manager for the 1959 season. It seems that he did not have separate accommodation, but used a corner of the common room as his bedroom and office.



Harry Kaye in his "room"  
(Photo by D. Pinkstone)

In December 1959, the Board decided that the Club should have a regular news sheet. Rod Illingworth agreed to edit the sheet. The first issue of Warrugang News appeared in

February 1960. The notes below provide some background for matters mentioned in the newsletters.

Prior to the 1960 season, the Board persuaded members that a Caterer/Manager should be appointed, and Lubor Vozab and his assistant Mervin Burrows were installed for the winter of 1960. They managed the lodge again in 1961. In 1962, Lu was assisted by Alex McGregor and in 1963, by Barbara Wigney (now Williamson).

Lu and his assistant Big Merv Burrows were a mad pair with a wicked sense of humour. A particular target for their jokes was Helen Jervie who, on one occasion, found a defunct mouse in her lunchtime meat pie. The irrepressible pair felt this was appropriate since she was a vet. On another occasion, she was the beneficiary of a "Wiener Schnitzel" lovingly constructed around a kitchen Wettex sponge.

A telephone was installed in 1960. The electricity grid reached Perisher Valley in 1960, but an early snowfall prevented connection to Warrugang. It was connected in 1961 and the space under the stairs occupied by the generator was converted into a boot cupboard. The double chair lift on Mt. Perisher was constructed in 1961. In 1962, the Kosciusko State Park Trust constructed a water supply system which was connected to all the lodges in the valley.

In the early years, the club members were young adults. Not surprisingly, they sometimes spoke of the club as a matrimonial agency. The early issues of the Warrugang News have many reports of engagements and marriages. Unfortunately, a number of enthusiastic foundation members found their growing family responsibilities incompatible with active membership of the club. Already in 1960, there was pressure for (at that time unaffordable) extension of the hut to provide family accommodation. Work on the basement did provide accommodation for the Caterer/Manager.

Thursday nights were Warrugang party nights. (Other clubs laid claim to other nights.) A group would come from Cooma Hut holding flaming torches to show the way down the mountain, across Perisher Creek and into Warrugang. There would be music, provided by accordion players from Cooma Hut, dancing and a lot of drinking. Everyone resident in the valley was invited. As the number of lodges increased, this became more and more difficult to manage and eventually died out. The story of couples using the boot cupboard for privacy originated with a party in 1962. (See Warrugang News, Vol. 3 Issue 6.)

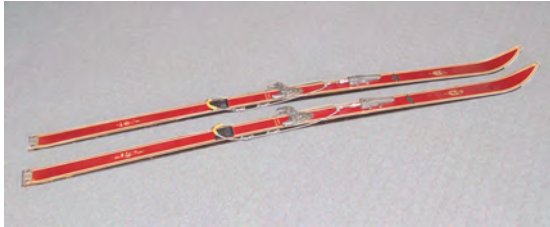
Before the advent of a Caterer/Manager, there were problems with the Aga stove as not everyone knew how to use it. If the lid of a hotplate not in use was left open, the plate would cool making it temporarily unusable. Sometimes cans of food were placed in an oven to heat without the can being punctured. The resulting explosion left a mess which was difficult to clean up. With limited kitchen equipment, people would have to wait for a chance to cook. There is a story of one woman seeking to impress her boyfriend by cooking an elaborate dinner using all the club's saucepans. The meal had to be eaten while hot, so the cleaning was left until later. This meant that the people waiting to cook had to clean the saucepans. These problems were solved in 1960 when Lu Vozab was appointed Caterer/Manager and took over the provision of meals.

In 1961, the club started holding weekly races, with everyone in the hut encouraged to participate. The courses were designed not to terrify beginners. At first, slopes adjacent to the hut were used. Later, when these were no longer available, quiet areas on the slopes facing the lodge were used. As late as the 1970's, it was still possible to find suitable areas there.

In the early days of skiing, there was no very strong separation of cross-country and downhill skiing. Without lifts, if you wanted to ski down a slope, you had to be able to climb up



it. The same skis were used for both. A commonly used binding had a cable which went around a groove in the heel of the boot. There was a screw for adjusting the length of the cable and a lever for tightening the binding. There were hooks on the sides of the ski. If the cable was passed under the hooks, it held down the heel. If not, the heel could lift as required for cross-country skiing. Skis could be attached for going uphill. An old pair of such skis and bindings is on display in the lounge.



The old skis ...



... and their bindings

The skis are too heavy for cross-country use while the bindings are not firm enough to give the control expected of modern bindings. They had no safety release mechanism. The bindings illustrated above are a later version of the cable binding. The toe pieces of the earlier ones had rigid sides and a leather strap over the boot. To get better control, those who considered themselves expert skiers used a longthong, a long leather strap which wound around the boot and hooks on the ski to hold the boot more rigidly to the ski. Barbie Graham reports that the leather of her longthongs commonly froze in place during skiing. Attempts to disentangle them at the end of the day so boots could be removed gave rise to numb fingers and many curses. These problems led to the composition, author unknown, of "The Longthong Lament" which appears in Warrugang News Vol. 3 Issue 5. Ski boots were made of leather. For a ski course run by the Scottish Council for Physical Recreation in 1959 (my first introduction to skiing), I bought a pair of army boots. The instructors hammered some metal studs into the heels of the boots to catch the cables.

Don Barnes     July 2010